



Environment and Sustainability Panel

Item

8

21st September 2023

Report of	Head of Sustainability	Author	David Carter 01206 282904
Title	Woodland & Biodiversity Project Update		
Wards affected	All Wards		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out and reviews the progress that has been made through the Woodland and Biodiversity Project which is now in year 5 of its five-year programme.
- 1.2 The project has evolved over the 5 years and has a clear objective and statement of purpose set out. The project focuses on three, intrinsically linked areas of work:
 - For our communities
 - For our wildlife
 - For our environment
- 1.3 The report sets out the activities being undertaken across these areas and highlights projects that demonstrate the impact being made in each.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 The Panel is asked to note the contents of this report.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 This report is for information only.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Not applicable.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 The Woodland Project (as it was initially called), launched in 2019. In response to learning, development and challenge, the principles and objectives of the project have evolved; from a clear aim of planting trees to make the borough greener and offset carbon emissions in year 1, to incorporating increased consideration of biodiversity and community focus in year 2, to a project that now focus on developing a legacy of a greener and biodiverse future for Colchester in year 3 and 4. The following project descriptions demonstrate the evolution of the project:

Year 1 (2019/20)

- 5.2 'The Colchester Woodland Project'

'Over the next five years, we plan to plant 200,000 trees across the borough as part of the Better Colchester campaign. Trees and woodlands are a vital part of our eco-system, and we are committed to preserving them and helping them to flourish. This is at the very heart of the Colchester Woodland Project. We want to make our borough even greener, and we want to help our community know, love, and use our woods and parks'

Year 2 (2020/21)

- 5.3 'The Colchester Woodland and Biodiversity Project'

'We plan to plant 200,000 trees across the borough in the next 5 years, as part of the Better Colchester campaign, as well as to encourage natural recovery networks that help wildlife and biodiversity. Trees and woodlands are a vital part of our eco-system. We are committed to planting trees and to helping them and wider biodiversity to flourish. We want to make our borough even greener. We want to help our community know and love and care for our environment, from wildflowers and meadows, to our woods and parks, old or new.'

Year 3 (2021/22)

- 5.4 'The Colchester Woodland and Biodiversity Project'

'Is a unique opportunity for everyone to work together and develop a legacy of a greener Borough for future generations.

The project aims to bring about improvements in 3 areas, our Communities, our Wildlife, and our Environment.'

Year 4 (2022/23)

- 5.5 'The Colchester Woodland and Biodiversity Project'

The project focuses on providing a unique opportunity for everyone (no matter what background, location, age, etc) to collaborate with others and create a legacy of a greener place for Colchester in the future. This sees an important shift in how such an ambition might be delivered and articulates the important outcomes from the project. The number of plants the project aims to plant has been removed from the project description, and there is continued focus on the breadth of a diverse programme of activities.

Year 5 in detail

- 5.6 Year 5 of the project will continue to develop in 23/24 by continuing to plant trees in suitable areas and by focusing on the naturalisation of sites, enhancing the biodiversity further, reviewing the management regimes and continue to communicate changes to our communities.

Providing a unique opportunity for everyone (no matter what background, location, age, etc) to collaborate with others and create a legacy of a greener place for Colchester in the future. This sees an important shift in how such an ambition might be delivered and articulates the important outcomes from the project. The number of plants the project

aims to plant has been removed from the project description, and there is continued focus on the breadth of a diverse programme of activities. To ensure that this aim is met, the project focuses on three intrinsically linked areas which it sets out to make tangible outcomes:

COMMUNITIES

- 5.7 To add value to the health and wellbeing of our communities and support the development of deep-rooted connection. We will:
- Improve physical health by enabling access to green spaces for everyone
 - Enable more people to be involved in nature based outdoor activities to improve physical and mental health
 - Help communities to benefit from urban planting
 - Help families create precious memories and stories

WILDLIFE

- 5.8 To develop, enhance and diversify our wildlife within Colchester. We will:
- Reduce mowing approaches on Council green spaces, in an effort to 'rewild' green spaces, creating habitats and an environment suitable for wildlife such as insects and pollinators
 - Create new woodlands
 - Recover and improve wildlife corridors and networks

ENVIRONMENT

- 5.9 Reduce the environmental impact of the Council and influence others to follow our lead: We will
- Help residents and businesses to make informed decisions about their impact on the environment in Colchester
 - Conserve and enhance biodiversity by reviewing our Greening Policy
 - Banning the use of glyphosate herbicide on Council owned green spaces
 - Contribute to the reduction in drought and flood risk
- 5.10 In working towards these outcomes and to deliver the best possible approach, the team have committed to the following:
1. We will not harm existing habitats
 2. We will use natural processes as far as practicable and possible
 3. We will seek to balance the needs of people and nature
 4. We will collaborate, consult, and involve communities and partners
 5. We will allow others to take part and own the project
 6. We will use every opportunity to influence others to follow our example

FOR OUR COMMUNITIES

- 5.11 Working with community groups on planting and activities days can deliver immense opportunity and impact on both community and individuals' health and wellbeing.
- 5.12 During year 3 of the Woodland & Biodiversity Project, seven different sites were planted and with the help of 425 volunteers, a total of 7,170 young trees were planted with a further 23,000 plants supplied to other organisations.
- 5.13 During year 4 of the Woodland & Biodiversity Project the team worked with six other organisations - The Big Green Internet, the Trust for Conservation Volunteers, The Ministry of Defense, Wivenhoe Town Council, The Unity Academy and Kent Wildlife Trust to identify suitable planting locations for the coming year.

- 5.14 During year 4 highlighting the success of the project, a presentation was given to One Colchester Climate Change Network.
- 5.15 To commemorate the Queen’s Jubilee year, we delivered the Jubilee Tree Canopy Project in partnership with our local communities. 22 Jubilee Oak Trees were planted by Town and Parish Councils in November 2022.
- 5.16 We delivered a Blossoms Circles programme, commemorating 2020 at King’s Meadow. Planting took place early in 2022 and the Council facilitated three planting days. With NHS staff attending the second planting day and various Councillors who joined the launch. Around 124 volunteers helped plant the blossom circles. Four local poets were invited to write poems which are now displayed at the site, and the poetry reading event took place in April which was a huge success. As part of the ongoing maintenance of the blossoms circles replacement tree planting will take place during November 2023 for the small number of trees which did not establish during 2022.
- 5.17 125 Street Trees were planted during year 4 of the project. . Work is underway to identify sites for 2023 and an application form has been completed and sent to ECC which requests funding for 225 street trees to be planted in locations which have been suggested by local Councillors.

Funding was secured to provide planting at the new Stanway Community Centre. The council entered into a partnership with Market Field School who delivered the project and maintenance until October 2023.

- 5.18 The team are also working on the following activities:

<p>C.1 Deliver an engagement campaign (schools, households, business, care homes)</p>	<p>Recognise those residents who support the project Across many sites in the Borough residents are taking it upon themselves to care and protect the newly planted sites. These ‘Tree Guardians’ are now being recognised and provided with the tools to help them continue with their roles. A campaign to recruit more Tree Guardians and showcase the wonderful work they do and the impact they make is being shared.</p> <p>More communities are aware and involved in projects Local schools have been contacted and offered trees and shrubs, along with farmers, landowners, and businesses for their landholdings.</p>
<p>C.2 Work with community organisations on activities</p>	<p>Our new Community Orchards project was launched on 1st August 2022 with an open invitation to all community organisations, town & parish councils and schools to propose sites where fruit trees might be grown to provide habitats for wildlife and a food source for people and pollinators alike!</p> <p>During autumn 2023 170 fruit trees will be delivered. The team are currently identifying potential sites for their suitability for fruit tree growing.</p> <p>Local schools and community groups have been contacted and offered trees along with landowners, businesses for there landholdings.</p>
<p>C.3 Deliver community planting days</p>	<p>The ambition to continue to plant trees and plants has not diminished and the project is continuing to deliver this aim.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity and spaces contribute to health of individuals Larger communities' benefit from urban and peri-urban planting 	<p>There have been over 68,000 trees planted so far, and in year 5 there are at least a further 2,000 planned. Officers are currently in the process of developing the plans and consulting on community planting days.</p> <p>As in previous years The Woodland Trust (WT) assess the suitability of each site and the location, scale and species mix of the trees being used. They provide funding for this element of the project and have supported and funded the Council's approach of using only biodegradable rabbit guards, reducing the risk of contaminating the local environment with plastic debris.</p>
<p>C.4 Deliver Trees for Years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> So residents can make a difference in their own gardens 	<p>Trees for Years will be delivered across the Borough much like in 2023. This is to ensure easier access for residents and to reduce travel time for those wishing to collect items. It is estimated that 10,000 trees and shrubs will be provided for residents.</p> <p>To ensure resilience and help manage the process, the distribution will be delivered through a click and collect service as this proven method that has been developed over the last couple of years enables residents to book a time to collect their trees as a location near to them.</p> <p>To facilitate the click and collect service, tree packs will be developed to suit different garden sizes.</p> <p>Officers will work with Parish Council and community groups for distribution sites, and it is anticipated the same sites will be used in February 2024.</p>
<p>C.5 Use Street Tag to encourage residents to monitor sites</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents are engaged with the impact of biodiversity and habitat recovery 	<p>Community enabling colleagues, working in partnership with the Essex Local Delivery Pilot have launched Street Tag, a free interactive app that promotes physical activity in a fun and accessible way.</p> <p>Street Tag turns physical activity into a game by converting walking, running, and cycling into Street Tag points (tags). It is a way to transform streets and parks into a giant virtual playground for local communities. Competitors compete to top the leader board and win prizes. More information can be found here: www.colchester.gov.uk/street-tag.</p> <p>In linking to this project, tags have been added to all the rewilding sites and encourage users to monitor the locations (e.g., the number of butterflies they see).</p>
<p>C.7 Greening the Orbital:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wayfinding, barrier removal, route enhancements as part of Phase 1 of 	<p>Colchester Orbital wayfinding discs have been installed on all CCC sites. Work is now taking place to install discs on sites that are not owned by CCC to increase accessibility and wayfinding along the Orbital.</p>

Greening the Orbital programme	
<p>C.8 Undertake (street tree) urban planting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More communities benefit from urban and peri-urban planting 	<p>Officers are working with colleagues on other Town Centre projects like the trees planted in containers at North Station Road and establish the opportunity for further tree planting as plans emerge.</p> <p>Officers are also working with Essex County Council and Essex Highways to establish the ability to increase urban planting. One opportunity is planting where dead or dying trees have been removed historically, and not replaced – these locations will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.</p> <p>Working with the Essex Forest partnership CCC have been successful in securing funding for urban tree planting from the Local Authority Tree Scape Fund (LATF) in 2021 & 2022. An application has been submitted 2023 with the outcome known in November. Local residents have been helping to maintain the trees as part of the Tree Guardians scheme including watering and tightening tree ties.</p>

FOR OUR WILDLIFE

Continue to deliver the Colchester Greening Policy

- 5.19 The Greening Colchester Policy was presented and agreed by the Environment and Sustainability Panel on 17 September 2020. Its aim was to stop the use of glyphosate-based products through a phased approach on Council owned land. The timeline published has been met and officers continue to work with partner organisations on implementing changes to their policies also.
- 5.20 Currently the following alternative methods of weed control are being carried out on Council owned land:
- Vegetation around obstacles and play areas is being cut back twice per year.
 - Vegetation along fence lines is being left to grow for wildlife and cut once per year
 - Non glyphosate weedkillers are being used on weed growth in car parks and pathways on CCC owned land.
- 5.21 As part of the Council's commitment to remove glyphosate-based products, the policy also introduced the stopping or reducing of grass cutting in specific areas to improve biodiversity and visual amenity of the grass verges, creating rewilded, wildflower or naturalised woodlands.
- 5.22 In 2022, alternatives to using glyphosate were rolled out on all CBH sites and the Cemetery and Crematorium. Agreed alternative for this year included:
- Obstacles to be strimmed every 6 weeks.
 - Hard surfaces to be hand weeded every 4 weeks.
 - Borders to be hand weeded where required on each visit.
 - Additional wildflower areas added for 2022, with one cut in September.
 - Additional "No Mow" butterfly signs delivered and used on CCC parks land.

- 5.23 Now that the policy has been in place and we have extended it to other sites as above, a review is currently being undertaken on the impact and effectiveness, and recommendations or changes will be made as appropriate.
- 5.24 It has been found that there is excessive weed growth on hard surfaces due to the cessation of Glyphosate herbicide and the initial aim to hand weed every 4 weeks has not been able to be achieved, due to the time it takes to weed at each site. The proposal to rectify this is to carry out an ongoing programme of strimming supported by hand weeding throughout the growing season. The use non harmful herbicides such as Katoun Gold will only be considered for spot treatment if strimming or hand weeding are not possible but will not be for general use.
- 5.25 Weeds in borders have also been prevalent and much like hard surfaces above, the preferred method of weed control will be by hand. Until a viable alternative is available it is proposed to use non glyphosate herbicides twice during the growing season on selected areas This is a reduction of using harmful herbicides at every visit and it will allow the teams to continue to hand weed on each visit, however the weed growth will be less. The use of non-glyphosate herbicide like Katoun Gold will only be undertaken when conditions allow to minimise spray drift onto plants and non-target insects. The team in partnership with Colchester Borough Homes have also trialled using bark mulch on borders and where this is applied, weed growth has been suppressed significantly. As a result of this positive impact and in conversations with other local authorities, it is proposed that a programme of mulching all border sites be undertaken. Increasing the amount of mulched borders, will reduce the amount of non-glyphosate herbicide required going forward.
- 5.26 The team are also working on the following activities:

<p>W.1 Undertake Phase 1 planting and planning at Cymbeline Meadow to create a new woodland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create new woodland • Recover biodiversity and habitats 	<p>There is an ambition to create a new woodland and Nature Reserve at Cymbeline Meadow. The aim is to replace agricultural land and enhance existing areas to deliver a diverse and rich mosaic of habitats across the whole site, for future generations of Colchester.</p> <p>Working with the tenant farmer plans have been drawn up detailing areas of hedge planting, pond and wetland creation, areas of nectar rich grassland, scrubland, bird seed rich crop areas and tree planting, including areas for future coppice woodland.</p> <p>CGI artwork has been produced which shows two of the main views across the meadows with year one and year 5-10 tree planting and meadows.</p> <p>Archaeological trenching has been carried out over the areas which are proposed for tree planting.</p> <p>The Woodland Trust have been assisting with the environmental impact assessment (E.I.A.) and supply of the native tree stock for community planting days in February/March 2024.</p> <p>This work helps to deliver objectives of the Greening The Orbital programme.</p>
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W.2 Engage and enable Parish Councils to establish new woodlands <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable others to create new woodlands 	Town & Parish Councils will be contacted and offered free trees and shrubs for planting on their land or for distribution to their residents.
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W.5 Continue to deliver the Colchester Greening Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced environmental impact of the Council 	See above

FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT

5.27 All of the objectives are intrinsically linked and an example of this is the work undertaken with Wivenhoe Town Council.

The Wivenhoe Project (Nature Recovery Sites)

5.28 Wivenhoe Town Council (WTC) worked with the Council's officers to trial a "no mow, no sow" management regime between March and September 2021 at 12 designated open spaces and residential verges in the town. The objectives were to work more closely with communities and establish if a local approach could increase biodiversity and to assess public reaction. This would be the first approach of this type undertaken by the project team, undertaken as a trial, so that if it was successful, it could be used as a template and example to roll out to other Councils and partners.

5.29 Following the successful trial over the summer of 2021, it was agreed that more sites within Wivenhoe would be left longer incorporating the 'no mow, no sow' principle. A total of 24 sites are now 'no mow, no sow' sites in Wivenhoe. In October 2023 some sites will have additional wildflowers introduced to increase the range of native species.

5.30 In 2022 other Town and Parish Councils were invited to an open evening where Wivenhoe Councillors and representatives from the Greening Team walked some of the 'no mow, no sow' sites and discussed the projects, shared best practice and issues that arose when changing the management regimes.

5.31 In Greenstead Nature Recovery sites. at Magnolia Fields and Hickory Avenue have been left as wildflower sites. It is anticipated that more discussions will be held with other Town and Parish Councils and local Councillors to identify further sites across the Borough.

5.32 The team are also working on the following activities:

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E.3 Roll out the Wivenhoe Project to other Parish Councils	See above

<p>E.4 Deliver an education campaign</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform others of our management methods and provide examples of how these can be applied 	<p>Officers continue to deliver presentations and talks to others, sharing the work undertaken by the Woodland and Biodiversity Project, locally, regionally, nationally and most recently at the Eco Festival in September 2023.</p>
<p>E.5 Provide help, support, and prepare Colchester for the future changes that may come forward from the new Agriculture and Environment Bills, through conversations and dialogue with farmers and landowners.</p>	<p>Officers are working with the current tenant Farmer at High Woods Country Park to develop proposals for meadow improvements.</p> <p>Officers are working to draw up Biodiversity Net Gain guidance for developers, officers, Members, and the public, in anticipation of the Environment Bill being enacted this autumn and to identify sites for Net Gain in the borough. A template supplementary planning document is being produced by Essex County Council (ECC) on Biodiversity Net Gain. CCC officers have provided feedback on this and will be adopting as our own (and adapt as appropriate) when final legislation is produced by Government.</p> <p>Officers will be in discussion with ECC about the development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Essex. The LNRS work seek to identify areas and habitats of high biodiversity value, map where biodiversity recovery has taken place, identify further areas and habitats which may become important and agree a set of measures to protect biodiversity. CCC officers will be consulted as a 'supporting authority' on the development of this strategy. The Environment and Sustainability Panel will receive updates on the progress of this at key points throughout the year.</p> <p>Officers are in discussion with partners about how to create a Nature Recovery Network for the borough.</p>
<p>E.6 Influence planning, strategies, policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce the environmental impact of the Council 	<p>Officers are working on developments on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colchester Orbital Guidelines Landscape Development Guidance Green Infrastructure Guide <p>Officers are also updating the Council's natural assets register to assist with conversations and plans for carbon offsetting.</p>

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 Throughout the work of this project Officers have taken due care in giving due consideration to equality and diversity and this is demonstrated through the rewording of the project and the commitments that the project team have created

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 This project supports the Council's Strategic Plan 2023-2026, specifically the theme of 'respond to our climate emergency' and the priority of 'conserve and enhance biodiversity'. It also contributes to the theme of 'improve health, well-being, and happiness' through the various engagement and planting activities outlined in the report.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 The approach to consultation on each of the activities has been dependent on the scope and aim of the specific activity due to the diversity of the work undertaken, but as the commitments set out in 5.9:

4. We will collaborate, consult, and involve communities and partners
5. We will allow others to take part and own the project

- 8.2 These commitments have been tested throughout the project and due consideration has been given to the timeliness and method of consultation for each activity.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 As with consultation, due consideration has been given to those who may be affected by activities. The team have consulted and listened to feedback and made changes, as can be demonstrated throughout this project.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 Year 5 the Council has provided funding up to £80,000 to deliver most of the work set out above, purchasing of plants and trees, fencing, marketing, equipment and maintenance, and technical assessments.
- 10.2 To deliver on more ambitious schemes, officers are working with the partners and other organisations to source external funding and support.

11. Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 It is hoped that working with organisations such as Market Field School, Trust Conservation Volunteers (TCV) and TWG on community planting days, the project can work towards aims of providing opportunities to support community safety and community cohesion.

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 The project does not cause any harm to the health and safety of the general public.

13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 Risks and opportunities are assessed based on each activity due to the variety of the work being undertaken.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

14.1 The project has very clear aims and objectives for the project in relation to the environment, nature, and sustainability. The outcomes in delivering these for Colchester residents are:

Improving health and well being

- Those living closer to greener space in urban areas have been found to experience lower rates of anxiety -[Imperial College London \(2019\)](#)
- Increasing access/proportion of green space in local areas can help develop more active lives, promote communication and socialising with others, as well as helping to capture carbon and improve air quality ([Public Health England, 2020](#))
- [Around 9 in 10 people surveyed by Natural England in May 2020](#) agreed that natural spaces are good for mental health and wellbeing. More than 40% noticed that nature, wildlife, and visiting local green and natural spaces have been even more important to their wellbeing since the coronavirus restrictions began

Contributing to reducing climate risk:

- It is estimated that there are around 2,000 heat-related deaths each year in England and Wales and this number is expected to more than triple to over 7,000 by the middle of the century, as a result of climate change. ([Link](#))
- Approximately 250,000 properties are at risk of flooding in the East of England, posing risks to mental health and wellbeing of the population as well as the operations of businesses ([source](#))