

ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

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| Report to | Environment & Amenities Committee |
| Meeting date | 3 August 2022 |
| Report author | Cllr Gabby Barody |
| Agenda item | 13 i) |

Proposal for the development of a biodiversity plan for the town of Abingdon Upon Thames

National and Local Background

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) 1992 (United Nations) was established and a treaty agreed on the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of biodiversity, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. Its overall objective is to encourage actions which will lead to a sustainable future.

In 2010, parties to the CBD adopted the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020, a ten-year framework for action by all countries and stakeholders to safeguard biodiversity and the benefits it provides to people. Locally, [The state of Nature Report in 2017](#) highlighted what had been achieved in Oxfordshire and what remains outstanding.

The average proportion of land which is covered by plant growth globally is 70%. The UK falls short of that at 53%. The well-established climate emergency has been the catalyst in setting the target for carbon neutrality by 2050 nationally and by 2045 locally in line with the Vale's overall plan. The Environment Agency (2021) has also publicised repeated warnings of a looming climate catastrophe, if immediate action is not taken, locally, nationally and internationally. Many towns and districts have already adopted a biodiversity or green plan. Abingdon Town Council therefore has a duty of care to establish its own biodiversity plan.

What we have done so far towards biodiversity in Abingdon

We have publicised to the town, including residents, businesses and interested groups, the intention of Abingdon Town Council (ATC), to develop a plan on biodiversity

A community woodland project, has been agreed fully funded with a 5-year plan, incorporating diverse planting, hedging, a wild meadow, pond and a community shared plot.

We have a naturalist society involved with the neighbourhood plan advising on green spaces and inputting into the community woodland project.

A biodiversity competition was launched over the summer, showcasing biodiversity in action from residents and organisations with private and shared spaces. The winners were announced and awarded prizes at the Mayor Making event in May 2022

Abingdon Learning Trust (ALT) announced a climate change event where three schools (Fitzharrys, Rush Common and John Mason) showcased their ideas for reducing carbon emissions, promoting biodiversity, shared community spaces and active travel. This event took place at the Guildhall on the 5th July 2022. ALT would like this to become an annual event.

A “Teens” clothes exchange event led by some of the teenager volunteers from One Planet Abingdon Climate Emergency Centre, was held at the Guildhall in March 2022. Further events have been proposed with the aim of making this a regular feature.

A Schools biodiversity competition will be launched this month, July 2022, where we will invite primary and secondary schools to showcase their biodiversity initiatives over the school term this academic year. The closing date for entries will be the end of September 2022, with prize giving for the winners and runner up categories to be formally presented later in the year.

All the above events were funded by ATC.

Proposal for Abingdon Town Biodiversity Plan

Biodiversity Mission Statement: “Give control back to nature”:

To promote natural biodiversity as a key concept within Abingdon, requiring appropriate timetabling and planning focusing on diverse habitats, regeneration and protection of the natural environment, ensuring food and species protection (bees, insects, birds etc.), promoting open green spaces as mini nature reserves, as well as places for people to enjoy and enhance their mental health and general well-being.

Overall aims and outcomes for the ATC Biodiversity Plan

- To be aligned with reversing the national commitment towards the decline of biodiversity by 2030.
- Reflect the national and international plans to minimise the incidence of drought, flooding and diseases. Neighbourhood and Local plans to reflect this and careful consideration if adopting the proposal of a reservoir in Abingdon.
- Actively promote and develop resilient ecological networks and green infrastructures.
- Actively work towards carbon absorption (30,000 units per 10 hectares is the national target).
- Actively work towards overall carbon neutrality.
- Actively protecting the environment, enhancing the wild/ natural local ecosystem (including a tree planting policy), allowing it to thrive, including planting the right trees and plants in the right place.
- Actively promoting outdoor activities, such as walking, cycling, natural bathing and green spaces for stress reduction, enhanced and restorative well-being and social prescribing.
- Actively encouraging a collaborative town approach to owning biodiversity, including all

residents, schools, businesses and charities.

- Produce an annual biodiversity report to Thames Valley Environment Record Centre (TVERG).

ACTIONING THE PLAN

- Set up an audit with the support of the outdoor team and the naturalists society, to establish the biodiversity we already have on town council land, including the green spaces that we own and the distribution of trees, and, examine what do we do well and what needs to change
- Produce a biodiversity tool kit in conjunction with The Green Forum, that can be used by businesses, organisations, schools and residents to establish and conserve biodiversity initiatives
- Produce a map as a resource to the town include meadows, woodlands (established or planned), hedges, ponds, rivers and other key natural areas.
- Refer to and utilize resources already in existence (see list below), to help develop our own plan.
- Agree the format for the plan over a 5-year period
- Form close alliances with interested parties, such as Carbon Cutters, Abingdon Livable Streets, One Planet Abingdon (Climate Emergency Centre), the Naturalists' Society and the Green Forum
- Consult and liaise with the Neighborhood Planning Group to ensure alignment and adoption of agreed actions
- Promote local initiatives such as biodiversity walks and rewilding projects alongside appropriate insurance cover
- Consult and liaise with schools in Abingdon (state and private) to provide support that can become part of their green curriculum
- To delegate authority to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chair of the Environment and Amenities Committee, to consult and procure expert advice and guidance when required to support these actions, utilising the already agreed yearly budget.

Helpful resources to inform and implement the plan

[The Vale Climate Emergency Report](#)

A [town council paper](#) to support a motion regarding biodiversity.

Oxfordshire County Council [guide regarding biodiversity](#).

Leicestershire County Council [document](#) detailing what town and parish councils can do for biodiversity – includes a section on biodiversity plans.

Cllr Gabby Barody
Environment and Amenities Committee
19th July 2022