

Cabinet report



10 March 2020

Environmental Policy: Core Outcomes – Action Plan (Greenest City : Physical & Natural Environment – Vision)

Name of Cabinet Member	Councillor Darlington Cabinet member for Public Realm
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Exempt / confidential / not for publication	No
Council Plan reference	Not in Council Plan
Wards affected	All wards

Executive summary

Biodiversity and natural processes are integral to life as we know it. Yet despite this biodiversity is in crisis on a local, national and global scale. Our Sustainability Strategy (2019 – 2050) sets out a vision for Milton Keynes as becoming a world-leading sustainable city.

Milton Keynes has a head start with linear parks forming corridors for biodiversity, linking key strategic reserves in the borough forming an integral part of the original design and identity of the city.

The “Greenest City” Position Statement outlines Milton Keynes as an ambitious and innovative green city, taking the action necessary to mitigate, adapt and respond to this environmental crisis. It committed to the development of an action plan working with our partners to deliver the principles and objectives set out in the vision.

Key partners include: The Parks Trust; Parish and Town Councils and specialist organisations such as The Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust, Canal and River Trust and local organisations such MK Community Trust all of whom have been instrumental to developing this Action Plan.

Four cross cutting elements have consistently emerged from the events;

- People
- Place
- Planning and Policy
- Programmes and Partnerships

1. Decision/s to be made

1.1 That the Action Plan principles to underpin the vision of the Greenest City – Core Policy Outcomes document be agreed.

1.2 That it be recognised that The Parks Trust and Parish and Town Councils have been instrumental in the co-production of this Action Plan and to have ownership of the deliverables.

1.3 That the valued contribution from community groups and residents through workshops and events to identify and co-produce Action Plan principles be recognised.

1.4 That the actions be agreed with short term (12 month) actions being delivered during 2020/21.

1.5 That a baseline action plan with costings for 2021/22 through to 2025 be developed as the next step that considers conservation and enhancement of the habitats on the land within the control of the local authority.

1.6 That a mapping and survey exercise be undertaken to assess biodiversity in Milton Keynes, identifying key sites for enhancement with a prioritisation matrix.

2. Why is the decision needed?

The Governments A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan (2018), sets out a comprehensive and long-term approach to protecting and enhancing the diversity of landscapes and habitats. The State of Nature report published in September 2019 shows that more species have shown strong or moderate decreases in abundance (41%) than increases (26%) since 1970.

Milton Keynes has always sought to be ahead of the curve in terms of environmental issues and these ambitions are captured within our planning document Plan MK sets out a vision for Milton Keynes as a green and spacious city.

The Sustainability Strategy (2019 – 2050) confirms the aspiration to become a world-leading sustainable city. In January 2019 the Council declared a Climate Emergency recognising that climate change is real and the detrimental impact is being felt around the world.

Milton Keynes has a proud and pioneering record in environmental action and the Council believes that tackling climate change must seek to tackle wider sustainability issues such as the use and interaction of natural resources and biodiversity is key to a sustainable and liveable city.

Milton Keynes was designed with wildlife, protecting ancient woodland and developing a series of interconnecting corridors connecting nature and people. In recognising these intrinsic values as part of the fibre of the borough, Milton Keynes must be the purveyor on demonstrating how to pass on the natural riches we have inherited to future generations and affirm its commitment to protecting, promoting and enhancing biodiversity in Milton Keynes, pledging to leave our natural environment in a better state than we found it.

This Action Plan is part of the delivery vehicle for this pledge 'The Greenest City: Physical and Natural Environment Vision'. Information that informs the Action Plan has been received across a range of events (See Appendix A).

There are four cross cutting elements that have emerged from the workshops, conferences and engagement with the Youth Cabinet. Feedback and evidence was collated and reviewed;

People – Overwhelmingly the greatest feedback received was the need for greater communication, with more engagement and education, tailored to meet the needs of different groups and communities. There is a desire to see more physical signage and local news articles.

Place – It was recognised by many that 'place' will have challenges. There was an acceptance that places may look different, including areas where grass is mowed less often and more wild flower planting takes place to encourage natural habitats that will also provide a food source for invertebrates.

Planning and Policy - There were many comments received on the need for long term management plans that would see Milton Keynes not just protect, but increase in size, space and number of species.

Programme and Partnership – For nature to take centre stage, it will require a sustained and consistent message from the Council and all its partners. To achieve the goals of an improved biodiversity and environment long term, we will need to align knowledge, skills and funding.

This vision is explored through the Physical & Natural Environment ‘Three Pillars’ of nature, water and trees and reinforcing their interaction and how our approach as an authority should be integrated.

We recommend that this be underpinned by the four key objectives expressed within the vision:

- **Conserve** and protect existing sites of biodiversity, wildlife areas and the principles of linear parks, wildlife corridors and designated sites.
- **Restore** and manage species and habitats appropriate to Milton Keynes and its wider regional physical and geographical context to levels those are sustainable in a changing climate.
- **Create** and secure sustainable ecological and physical processes that underpin the way ecosystems work, thereby enhancing the capacity of our natural environment to provide ecosystem services.

Across the range of organised events a ‘Fourth Pillar’ became evident;

- **Community** - Ensuring information, engagement and access for people with natural environments rich in wildlife to enjoy and experience. This means not just the physical access but also the engagement and inclusivity of nature, regardless of age, race, ability or gender.

The Action Plan takes the next step in developing what is necessary to support and maintain what we have existing within the borough, to develop new habitats as linked creation of new habitats will also be linked to local priority species locally and regionally and to ensure these are linked together in terms of access for residents for wellbeing and health.

This will ensure that our vision is building on existing success while creating new opportunities for nature and interlinking both current and new opportunities with nature for our residents.

3 Implications of the decision

a) Financial implications

There are financial implications arising from the Action Plan to deliver the strategy.

Funding for deliverables in 2020/21 have been agreed through the Budget 2020/21 Budget setting process as part of Annex W.

£350k - Tree work (crowning lifting, tree planting) in Central Milton Keynes
 £150K - Tree surveying and new arboriculture support
 £250k - Borough wide tree maintenance
 100k - Tree planting and replacement
 £150K - Wildflower seeding grid roads
 £100K - Green roofs (with £20K Parish match funding)
 £75K –Biodiversity adaptation planting and future greening projects
 £15K – ‘Eco Warriors’ school education programme

A baseline action plan to cover off proposed actions in the medium term with costings, timeframes and partners from 2021 through to 2025 will be developed as the next step to be considered as a budget pressure within the annual budget setting cycle to come to Cabinet in February 2021.

b) Legal implications

There are no legal implications arising.

Financial	Yes	Human rights, equalities, diversity	No
Legal	No	Policies or Council Plan	Yes
Communication	Yes	Procurement	Yes
Energy Efficiency	Yes	Workforce	No

c) Other implications

3. Alternatives

- a) Accept the plan - Works towards the Sustainability Strategy (2019 – 2050). Agree that the short term (12 month) actions are delivered over 2020/21 and that a Delivery Plan with costings and time frames for 2021/22 through to 2025 is developed as the next step. **Recommended option**
- b) Do not accept the plan - The “Greenest City” Position Statement outlines Milton Keynes as an ambitious and innovative green city, taking the action necessary to mitigate, adapt and respond to this environmental crisis. It committed to the development of an action plan working with our partners to deliver the principles and objectives set out in the vision. The proposed action plan informs the costed delivery plan.
- c) Plan not accepted - Further consultation required before a plan can be considered.

4. Timetable for implementation

Activity	Timetable
Accept the Action Plan	March 2020
Commence activities as outlined in 3a) Financial Implications	April 2020 onwards
Compose detailed baseline action plan for items beyond 2020/21 delivery horizon	September 2020
Provide financial information on deliverables for Action Plan as part of budget setting process	October / November 2020
Provide update to Cabinet on 2020/21 deliverables and medium term delivery plan, subject to budget	February 2021
Present to Parishes (at Parishes Forum) and Parks Trust	February 2021

List of annexes

Annex A – Physical and Natural Environment Action Plan – Key Priorities

Annex B – Workshops and Meetings Consultation Timetable (2019/20)

List of background papers

[Environmental Policy: Core Outcomes -Greenest City in the World: Physical & Natural Environment – Vision](#)