



Environment & Sustainable Communities Committee	Agenda Item
12 June 2023	8

Title:	Sustainable Land Use Advice
Report of:	Lead Member for Climate and Environment
Lead Member:	Cllr. Bridget Smith
Public Report:	Yes
Key Decision:	No
Voting Arrangements:	A simple majority of voting Members

Recommendations:

A	To note the outcome of a consultation on the scope of a sustainable land use advice service
B	To request a business case for the advice service that aligns with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy programme of activity

Strategic Objective(s):

The proposals within this report fit under the following strategic objective(s):	
	Achieving ambitious skills and employment opportunities
	Achieving good growth
	Increased connectivity
X	Enabling resilient communities

1. Purpose

1.1	This report asks the Committee to approve the development of a revised business case for the sustainable land use advice programme that aligns to the LNRS.
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2. Proposal

2.1	That the proposed sustainable land use advice service be aligned with the LNRS engagement process to maximise the delivery benefits from the LNRS and for land managers. To receive a business case at the next Committee meeting that draws upon the emerging LNRS engagement strategy.
2.2	The project delivers to the Strategic Objectives of good growth and enabling resilient communities. It will enable businesses and other land managers to introduce more nature-friendly processes that also align with their business objectives. This will make them more adaptable to environmental / climate crises, and also deliver against the doubling nature target.

3. Background

3.1	The Board agreed a revenue budget allocation of £150k to provide an advice service that would support landowners in reinstating natural processes in the management of land. A consultation exercise was undertaken in 2022, which supported appropriate advice but (a) overall opinion was advice should enable natural processes alongside productive use of land and (b) through appropriate engagement.
3.2	A key part of the new duty for the preparation of a statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is engagement with those who manage the land (including farm businesses and other landowners).
3.3	One of the principles proposed for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy is that it should address delivery, and not just be a mapping of potential nature recovery. To be successful the LNRS needs the voluntary support of land managers in areas of potential to enact change.
3.4	There is a strong alignment between the LNRS (both in its preparation and delivery) and the proposed advice service.
3.5	The consultation on the service received 19 survey responses from a mix of farm businesses, environmental bodies with land holdings, and advisers. Direct conversations were also undertaken with relevant stakeholders, including Natural Cambridgeshire as the Local Nature Partnership and the National Farmers Union. The results showed general support for sustainable land-use, but raised queries over definitions. There was a strong preference for making adjustments to land management practices rather than allocating large elements of land to natural regeneration. There was also strong support for approaches that provided a wide range of benefits, rather just increasing areas of natural habitat. The consultation highlighted that any advice needed to come from credible and 'trusted' intermediaries that understood land management issues. Advice was requested across the geography of the Combined Authority and not restricted to those areas with greatest potential for habitat restoration.
3.6	There was a strong view from the consultation that land management change was either somewhat or completely dependent on national funding mechanisms as a prerequisite for sustainability projects. Support in accessing funding and bid development was a theme. Some respondents were uncertain of the benefit of an advice service in impacting on their decision to undertake more sustainable measures, but a majority felt that it would have benefits. There was good support for an element of bid support in the service.
3.7	Given the synergies with the LNRS programme there are obvious benefits in aligning the service with the engagement requirements of the programme.

4. Appendices

4.1	None.
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5. Implications

Financial Implications

5.1	The MTFP carried forward a Subject to Approval revenue budget of £150k allocated to this project, £75K in 23/24 and £75k in 24/25.
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Legal Implications

6.1	None.
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Public Health Implications

7.1	Indirectly though public health benefits of access to nature.
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Environmental & Climate Change Implications

8.1	The project to enhance (and thereby recover) biodiversity and nature, contributing to tackling the biodiversity crisis. Solutions can have wider environmental and other benefits, including flood resilience, water management, carbon sequestration and storage. Working with land managers to provide advice that also delivers their business or organisational objectives.
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Other Significant Implications

9.1	All local authorities have a duty introduced by the Environment Act 2021 to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity by January 2024, and to agree policies and objectives as soon as possible afterwards.
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Background Papers

10.1	None.
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