

Report to: Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment

Date of meeting: 27 April 2015

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Notice of Motion: decisions to enhance the natural environment

Purpose: To consider a Notice of Motion from Councillors O’Keeffe and Earl concerning the recognition of opportunities to develop green infrastructure in relevant County Council’s decisions

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to recommend that the County Council:

- (1) reject the Notice of Motion from Councillors O’Keeffe and Earl because it does not recognise the range of strategies already adopted by the County Council that promote the natural environment, and, the need to work with partners to enhance delivery of improvements to the natural environment;**
 - (2) agree an amended Notice of Motion as set out in paragraph 2.6 of this report.**
-

1 Background

1.1. The following Notice of Motion has been submitted by Councillors O’Keeffe and Earl:

“This Council notes that a thriving natural environment (natural capital) in East Sussex is of great value in providing significant health benefits to individual residents and the community as a whole and multiple benefits for the County’s economy through ecosystem services, for example flood risk reduction, delivery of clean air, micro-climate regulation, pollination and accessible nature.

The Council therefore resolves to take advantage of any appropriate opportunity within East Sussex to be respectful of and where possible work with others to enhance these natural systems, for example through the maintenance and further improvement of green infrastructure (GI) and ecological networks in our stewardship; this includes nature reserves and other open spaces that we have responsibility for, and GI relating to our buildings and highway infrastructure.

As a Council we will look to give proper weight to environmental management and community aspirations together with economic issues in the decision making process so as to embed GI network delivery into the delivery of the Council Priorities and Capital Programme for the County.”

1.2. In line with the County Council’s practice, the matter has been referred by the Chairman to the Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment for consideration to provide information and inform debate on the Motion. The Lead Member’s recommendation will be reported to the Council at its meeting on 12 May 2015.

2 Supporting information

2.1. Recognition of the economic, social and environmental benefits of the natural environment is embedded within the County Council through the production of key relevant strategies and in appropriate decision making.

2.2. The County Council already recognises the economic and social value of the natural environment of the County, notably within:

- 1) The Environment Strategy for East Sussex, adopted by the County Council in 2011, in which a key principle is to protect and enhance the natural environment. The Strategy was developed by over

20 organisations including the district and borough councils, the Environment Agency, the Health Service, Natural England, the South Downs National Park Authority, the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee, Action in Rural Sussex and the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

2) The Economic Development Strategy, adopted in 2012, which recognises that the high quality natural environment of the county is a key asset. A priority of the Strategy is to enhance these assets, amongst others, to help drive a thriving visitor economy. This is reinforced in the more recent East Sussex Growth Strategy (2014).

3) The Health and Wellbeing Strategy, adopted in 2013, which recognises the availability of open spaces as a means of contributing to the objective of increasing rates of physical activity, leading to healthier lifestyles.

2.3. All three strategies were developed with a range of partners and recognise the importance of a joined up, integrated and multi-agency approach to delivery. The Environment Strategy, in particular, seeks to identify appropriate opportunities to protect and enhance the local natural environment and sets these out in a high-level annual action plan. The Strategy sets out the vision for the environment of East Sussex and establishes 10 environmental principles. It also identifies for each principle short/medium term actions and highlights which organisation is to be the lead partner and the other key partners who will be involved for each action. Projects include, for example, gaining investment into a visitors centre at Combe Valley Countryside Park, habitat and landscape improvements at Riverside Park in Newhaven, and actions to protect and enhance the natural environment that is within East Sussex County Council's stewardship (e.g. management of countryside sites and highway verges). Most of the actions in this area are the remit of partner organisations, for instance the South Downs National Park Authority and Natural England.

2.4. The decision-making processes that put this into practice include allocation of funding in the local transport plan capital programme, planning management and consideration of bids for external funding. Such processes also seek to give proper weight to community aspirations. In some cases this is identified, through specific community engagement activities (e.g. the current consultation process on shaping the future of our countryside access). Sometimes decisions enable economic, social and environmental benefits to be gained (e.g. the very successful Wheels-to-Work programme) and sometimes decisions require a trade off between these areas. Planning decisions by the County Council also take into account environmental factors.

2.5. The County Council has carried out mapping of the location and estimated condition of strategic green infrastructure (GI) within the county. The next step is to identify where there may be the need and opportunity for improving existing GI and/or developing new GI, for instance to support proposed areas of housing growth. The County Council is working in partnership with other organisations, such as the South Downs National Park Authority, on this next phase. This will help to improve the current evidence base that is used in County Council decisions. A major contribution to enhanced GI is the environmental mitigation associated with the Bexhill Hastings Link Road. This involves an overall ratio of compensatory habitat to habitat loss of 2:1, and wildlife features such as a "green bridge" and new ponds.

2.6. It is considered that the Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors O'Keeffe and Earl should be rejected as it does not recognise the range of strategies already adopted by the County Council, and the need to work with partners to enhance delivery of improvements to the natural environment. It is therefore proposed that the Lead Member for Transport and Environment recommends the County Council to support an amended Notice of Motion as set out below which endorses the on-going work with partners to identify opportunities to improve existing green infrastructure, and develop new green infrastructure.

The amended Notice of Motion to read:

"This Council notes that a thriving natural environment (natural capital) in East Sussex is of great value in providing significant health benefits to individual residents and the community as a whole and multiple benefits for the County's economy through ecosystem services, for example flood risk reduction, delivery of clean air, micro-climate regulation, pollination and accessible nature.

The Council recognises the economic, social and environmental benefits of the natural environment through the Environment Strategy for East Sussex, the Economic Development Strategy and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. In delivering these adopted strategies, this Council will continue to work with

partners to identify opportunities to improve existing green infrastructure, and develop new green infrastructure

3 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1. Enhancement of the natural environment is already recognised by the County Council in the production of relevant strategies and in decision taking in implementing the strategies and other related action. The County Council also works with partners to identify opportunities to further improve green infrastructure. The Lead Member is therefore recommended to recommend the Council to reject the submitted Notice of Motion, and agree the amended Motion as set out in paragraph 2.6 above.

RUPERT CLUBB

Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Contact Officer: Andy Arnold

Tel. No. 01273 481606

Email: andy.arnold@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None