

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 12th MARCH 2015
title: BIODIVERSITY OFFSETTING SCHEME
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
principal author: PHIL JOHNSON

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform Members and gain the agreement of Committee to agree the circumstances under which the Council should use the Biodiversity Offsetting Scheme.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities
 - The changes will help to make peoples lives safer and healthier, and;
 - Protect and enhance the existing environmental quality of our area.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The draft Core Strategy emphasises the importance of landscape protection (key statement EN2), sustainable development and climate change (EN3), and biodiversity and geodiversity (EN4). In particular key statement EN4 states that there should be "a net enhancement of biodiversity". Additionally the NPPF (Chapter 11) requires that the Council minimise the impact on, and where possible provide net gains in biodiversity, and that as a local authority the Council should plan positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure.
- 2.2 A relatively high amount of the development within the Ribble Valley takes place on greenfield sites with existing habitat and biodiversity considerations an important factor in any planning decision. The majority of those developments are possible whilst conserving and enhancing biodiversity, meaning a net gain of biodiversity on site and therefore ensuring an improvement to the environment, habitat and public amenity.
- 2.3 However, on some sites space is at a premium and it is not possible to include landscaping areas of sufficient size to allow significant conservation and enhancement of habitat. In some instances it is important to consider whether or not alternative landscape mitigation and compensation measures could be employed which would allow the promotion of appropriate development schemes. On these sites it is important to have an alternative mechanism for the delivery of environmental and public amenity improvements.
- 2.4 The biodiversity offsetting pilot began in 2013 and Ribble Valley Borough Council were lucky enough to be accepted as an additional pilot area within the scheme. Within the Ribble Valley there is currently one offsetting receptor site – Primrose Lodge – where it is hoped that biodiversity offsetting contributions from appropriate developments will

result in the Council being able to raise £115,000 towards the cost of the identified necessary improvements at the lodge (in addition to further money being raised from Section 106 agreements as appropriate).

- 2.5 Biodiversity offsetting receptor sites must identify the work required to improve the biodiversity of the site and, using a nationally recognised metric, allocate a number of 'credits' available for purchase. The cost of the work in total is estimated and then the value of each credit is awarded based on that estimate. At Primrose Lodge there are 15.9 credits available for purchase with a total project cost of £115,000 that means a cost of £7,232.70 per credit. The management plan, cost estimates, and number of credits available for Primrose Lodge were finalised in August/September 2014, and the first credit purchase is expected in relation to the former Barkers Nursery site as a condition of the consent for retail units.
- 2.6 So far the Council has received one contribution towards biodiversity offsetting at Primrose Lodge totalling 1.59 credit (£11,500), this was received as a part of the development scheme on the corner of Littlemoor and Whalley Road. The contribution was made in order to ensure that there was a net gain in biodiversity as a result of the development.

2 ISSUES/SUGGESTIONS

- 3.1 In order to abide by paragraph 109 of the NPPF, and Key Statement EN4 of the Core Strategy the Council must provide net gains in biodiversity as a result of development, one mechanism to achieve this is through biodiversity offsetting on suitable receptor sites.
- 3.2 It is proposed that the Biodiversity Offsetting Scheme as outline by the Environment Bank is used as a matter of course on: all major applications; any application within or adjacent to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Biological Heritage Sites (BHS), or other local, regional or national sites of biological importance; other applications as deemed appropriate by the Head of Planning. This will ensure that schemes that have a minor negative or a neutral impact on biodiversity, but that would otherwise be considered to be appropriate development, may be approved subject to appropriate contributions towards improvements on receptor sites.
- 3.3 The Council expects a net enhancement of biodiversity on site wherever possible, and it is the responsibility of the developer to demonstrate that an enhancement will be achieved whether that is on site or via the Biodiversity Offsetting Scheme. It is important to remember that the Council can and do refuse applications where there is insufficient landscaping and habitat creation on site, this approach will continue with biodiversity offsetting only used where there is a minor loss or no enhancement on the development site. The Biodiversity Offsetting Scheme does not negate the need for high quality landscaping schemes on development sites within the Borough.
- 3.4 In order to undertake the Biodiversity Offsetting Scheme all developers of appropriate sites (as outlined at paragraph 3.2) will be required to include biodiversity credit scoring within their submitted ecology reports. This scoring must clearly indicate the current number of credits on the site, and the number of credits that the site would gain and/or lose as a result of development. On schemes where there is a minor loss or no net gain identified the developer would then be required to offset via the Biodiversity Offsetting

Scheme, with the number of credits required to be negotiated through the planning process.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources – The Environment Bank charges for the brokerage of offsetting credits, however, this charge is added as a percentage to the fee the developer pays for each credit. Therefore there is no direct cost to the Council.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – The proposal would allow for further environmental improvements within the borough.
- Political – No implications identified.
- Reputation – The securing of biodiversity enhancements at key sites within the borough could benefit the reputation of the Council.
- Equality & Diversity – No implications identified.

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

5.1 Agree to the use of the Biodiversity Offsetting Scheme for:

- All major applications
- All applications on or adjacent to SSSI, BHS, or other local, regional or national sites of biological importance
- Other sites where deemed appropriate by the Head of Planning

5.2 Agree to the inclusion of appropriate Council owned sites as receptor sites.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

(If any)

For further information please ask for Phil Johnson, extension 4505.

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