

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**LOCAL DEVELOPMENT WORKING PARTY**

**13<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2007**

**INTRODUCTION TO THE HABITAT INVENTORY**

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**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report provides a brief in introduction to the Habitat Inventory (HI). The HI is a new Geographic Information System (GIS) tool which will aid in the creation of the LDF and determination of planning applications in relation to the protection and enhancement of wildlife.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 That members note the report

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Habitat Inventory (HI) is a map of the habitats in Worcestershire. It categorises individual land areas according to their habitat. This information can then be viewed using a Geographic Information System (GIS) package.
- 3.2 The HI was produced by Worcestershire County Council. The County was first mapped using aerial photography. These photographs were then analysed by experts in GIS and ecology, and each pocket of land was assigned to a habitat category and given a habitat code. This information can then be loaded on to a GIS system.
- 3.3 Once in the GIS information on individual pockets of land or habitat types can be extracted. Each habitat type can be assigned an individual colour, giving a visual representation of the habitats in the District. This information can be used to identify potentially important habitats, for example habitats which have are UK conservation priorities and have associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP).
- 3.4 The HI has a multitude of uses in regards to the planning system. It can be used to flag up potentially valuable habitats, leading to more informed decision making in the determination of planning applications. This information can act as a trigger to request further ecological information from the applicant. It can also highlight policy considerations, such as

presence of a valuable habitat or importance to the functioning of a wildlife corridor, which will affect a planning decision. The HI is also a valuable tool when agreeing biodiversity mitigation schemes through a development, either on site or through a Section 106 agreement, providing information on what type of habitats are in the locality and what could be re-created.

- 3.5 The HI will also be used to inform the creation of planning policies, forming part of the evidence base for our Local Development Framework (LDF).
- 3.6 The HI can be used to inform decisions related to areas outside of land use planning. It could inform wider environmental improvements, such as landscape scale habitat enhancement, woodland creation and waterways improvements. It can also help us to meet our BAP targets, particular in relation to specific habitats.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The total cost was £2700 which has already been accounted for within existing budgets.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The information provided by the HI will help to ensure that our policies and decisions meet the requirements of Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation. This requires all planning policies and decisions to be based upon up-to-date information about the environmental characteristics of the area, and to aim to maintain and enhance, restore or add to biodiversity interests.
- 5.2 Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC) the Council has a statutory duty to have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity in exercising all of its functions. By conserving, this means protecting, enhancing and re-creating. The HI can provide information to ensure that we meet this statutory duty.
- 5.3 Although not legally binding, it is worth noting that the Council is a signatory of the Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan. Biodiversity Action Plans are the UK government's delivery mechanism for achieving its responsibility under the Convention on Biological Diversity, signed in 1992 as an outcome of the Rio Earth Summit. The Council therefore has an important role in achieving actions for the preservation and enhancement of the county's most important and/or threatened habitats and species, as listed in the BAP. The HI can inform actions towards achieving these.

#### **6. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES**

<b>Council Objective (CO)</b>	Regeneration (CO1)	<b>Council Priority (CP)</b>	A thriving market town (CP1)
<b>Impacts</b>			
<p>Inform regeneration in terms of the natural environment – access for all to good quality open spaces and the natural environment is an important aspect of regeneration and of creating attractive and healthy places to live and work. Places which are well linked to the natural environment and include natural areas often prove more popular than those which do not, and this may have an impact on their value and the local economy. Bromsgrove’s natural environment is one of the factors which attract people to the District.</p>			

<b>Council Objective (CO)</b>	Improvement (CO2)	<b>Council Priority (CP)</b>	Customer service (CP2)
<b>Impacts</b>			
<p>More information relating to planning applications available upfront – enabling a more prompt response to both to the developer and to the applicant, reducing costly and time consuming delays and the number of applications refused due to lack of ecological information.</p>			

<b>Council Objective (CO)</b>	Sense of Community and Well Being (CO3)	<b>Council Priority (CP)</b>	Sense of community (CP3)
<b>Impacts</b>			
<p>The natural environment has an important role to play in terms of sense of community and well being. Natural areas provide space for recreation, away from the work and home environment, and a space to breathe. The role of this in terms of mental health and sense of well being is well documented. This can also impact health; the natural environment provides a space for informal recreation activities such as walking. Natural areas also act as a meeting place and a space for community activities, increasing the sense of community.</p>			

<b>Council Objective (CO)</b>	Environment (CO4)	<b>Council Priority (CP)</b>	Housing (CP4) Clean streets and recycling (CP5)
<b>Impacts</b>			
<p>Can inform decisions regarding the least damaging locations for new housing. Can inform the design of new housing with inclusion of natural areas and access to the natural environment, making them more sustainable, helping to make them attractive to potential inhabitants and pleasant places to live.</p>			

**7. RISK MANAGEMENT**

7.1 None

**8. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 More efficient and informed decision making on planning applications in regard to biodiversity. Reduced delays in determination of applications due to lack of information and on ecological grounds.

**9. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None

**10. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 None

**11. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT**

11.1 None

**12. APPENDICES**

12.1 None

**13. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

13.1 None

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