

Manor Woods Valley Group

Our Responses to Local Development Proposals and Planning Applications in Relation to the Natural Environment and Greenspaces

The Strategy Documents:

One City Plan – third iteration – 2021 (ref 1)

“It describes the product of our city’s commitment to come together to agree on and work towards the future we want for Bristol to 2050 and the steps we need to take to achieve it”

One City Ecological Emergency Strategy – September 2020 (ref 2)

“Bristol was the first UK city to declare an Ecological Emergency. This is our city’s opportunity to come together and take positive action for nature while tackling some of our biggest challenges.”

West of England Nature Partnership (WENP) Nature Recovery Network – July 2021 (ref 3)

“To reverse the declines in biodiversity and realise nature’s recovery at scale, we need to work together and on the landscape-scale to embed the Lawton principles of Bigger, Better, More and Joined Up into our policies and strategies. This means protecting and enhancing our existing natural habitats, but also making them bigger, creating new areas of species-rich habitat, and, critically, ensuring they join up to create functional and resilient ecological networks that enable nature and people to thrive.”

Manor Woods Valley Group’s Position

The Manor Woods Valley Group (MWVG) will respond to local, and potentially more distant, development proposals and planning applications that could have any appreciable impact (negative or positive) on local, and potentially wider, ecology and biodiversity. At all times we will aim to respond in a non-confrontational or judgemental fashion, but instead we will test developments against the criteria and targets for the preservation and improvement of the natural environment contained in the three strategy documents.

This document lays out statements contained in the strategy documents, especially those that we have highlighted, against which we will test proposals and/or applications. As these statements are drawn from environment related strategy documents prepared or sponsored by Bristol City Council (BCC), this means that we will test proposals/applications against the Council’s own stated aims and policies.

If necessary, we will challenge and require, using the words and phrases contained in the strategies, Council officers and elected representative, to justify why any proposed development should over-ride the aims and desired outcomes of the environment related strategy documents. We will question the worth of the Council's contribution to, and stated support for, these strategies if their decision-making processes and outcomes is contrary to the environmental elements of these strategies.

As a principal, we reject any suggestion that site planning designations contained in the local plan of 2014 over-ride the aims, conclusions and measures proposed in the strategy documents. The latter post-date the local plan and highlight the immediacy of the environmental issues that we face in the city and beyond. These issues were not as well understood or appreciated at the time the local plan was published.

Referencing the three strategy documents in this document does not preclude MWVG referencing other BCC or third-party strategy documents or querying other aspects of a proposal/application, for example the scope and/or veracity of supporting survey data and/or interpretation of same.

Statements Contained in the Strategy Documents

The Issues

Nature is in decline globally, nationally and within the West of England, threatening our health, prosperity and security. The need to act is urgent, as recognised by declarations of ecological emergencies in the West of England. To reverse the decline and deliver nature's recovery, we need to work to Lawton's Principles and create bigger, better, more and joined-up habitats. (ref 3)

Bristol has already suffered major losses in wildlife. In urban areas, housing developments, commercial building and roads have replaced and fragmented wildlife habitats. We have tidied away the places where wildlife used to live, we have paved over our front gardens and filled up the holes in our buildings where birds used to nest. These losses matter to all of us because of the crucial role that wildlife and ecosystems play in supporting life on earth....we need to change the way we're interacting with nature, because what we're doing now isn't working. (ref 2).

We don't have the luxury to delay any longer, time is running out fast. (ref 2) "2021 must be the year to change gear and put the world on track. We need to move from death to health; from disaster to reconstruction; from despair to hope; from business as usual to transformation. The Sustainable Development Goals are more important now than ever." - Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations (ref 1)

Development has been a significant driver of loss of wildlife in urban areas, with buildings, roads and other transport routes contributing to the destruction and fragmentation of habitats. We need to ensure that we're learning lessons from the past and building new houses and transport links that put back lost habitats and wildlife corridors. (ref 2)

With the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and the West of England councils having each declared a Climate Emergency, the strategy is now more relevant than ever ensuring that our network of multifunctional urban and rural green space responds to the climate and ecological emergency. (ref 3)

The Solutions

To reverse the declines in biodiversity and realise nature's recovery at scale, we need to work together and, on the landscape-scale to embed the Lawton principles of Bigger, Better, More and Joined Up into our policies and strategies. This means protecting and enhancing our existing natural habitats, but also making them bigger, creating new areas of species-rich habitat, and, critically, ensuring they join up to create functional and resilient ecological networks that enable nature and people to thrive. (ref 3)

Government's 25 Year Environment Plan published in January 2018 includes a commitment to "develop a Nature Recovery Network to protect and restore wildlife, and provide opportunities to re-introduce species that we have lost from our countryside." (ref 3)

If we are to halt the decline of wildlife and start to restore nature's abundance, we need to stop destroying wildlife habitats... (and) ... ensure that remaining habitats are protected, connected and restored. We need to tackle the twin threats of climate and ecological breakdown to save our planet for people and wildlife. Fortunately, it's not too late to act and we know the solutions, but we need to act now. We need to make the next ten years a decade of transformation, to make Bristol a haven for wildlife by 2030 ... (and to) restore the natural systems on which we depend. (We need to) reduce our city's ecological footprint. (ref 2) ... we will ... protect and enhance green spaces ... (ref 1)

WENP has led the development of a vision for a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) in the West of England as a joined up network of marine and terrestrial habitats where nature and people can thrive. (ref 3)

"From today, we will work together as a city to ensure that 30% of Bristol's land is managed for nature. We will create space for nature, and unite to find new, fair and inclusive ways to reduce and eliminate the threats to habitats and wildlife. Together we will take action for nature so that both people and wildlife can benefit." (ref 1 & 2) The Environment Board aims to accelerate Bristol's response to the climate and ecological emergencies (ref 1)

... all remaining green spaces are now a vital refuge for pollinators and other wildlife. ...we need to: Protect remaining wildlife habitats and care for them better. Work together to provide more habitat for wildlife throughout the city ... (and) Ensure that new developments adopt the highest standards of design, working with nature to provide positive benefits to people and wildlife.... (ref 2)

Ensure all developments, including strategic projects, within the West of England deliver a net gain in biodiversity and stringent standards for resource efficiency

Bristol City Council is working with neighbouring authorities to ensure that net gain is achieved across the West of England Combined Authority area. ... we know we need greener developments that retain and integrate habitats and green space and incorporate new green roofs, living walls and amenity spaces. We need to make sure we're making space for nature, in existing houses, offices and highways. (ref 2)

... we also need to replace some of the lost nesting and resting places that our buildings used to provide through the addition of features such as bird boxes, swift chimneys and bat bricks.

To meet these goals we must ... take significant action on the environment. We are not alone in this challenge, and we will build on the work of many others around the globe. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will help us to put social inclusion and environmental sustainability at the heart of recovery planning, and this strategy is aligned with, and will be measured against the SDGs. ... (ref 1)

2020's lockdown restrictions resulted in ... many experienced a new connection with and reliance upon the local environment. However, these were not achieved through voluntary choices and we have been working with the Economy and Skills Board to ensure that the One City Economic Recovery and Renewal Strategy has the climate and ecological emergencies at its heart in order to achieve long-term and sustainable transformation. We aim to ensure that the global recognition Bristol has earned for its work to become more sustainable to date is matched by its efforts to achieve a green and fair recovery from COVID-19. (ref 1)

The Results

...the benefits of protecting natural spaces outweigh the costs at least five to one. (ref 2)

(Post-Covid) ...Our overarching priorities are: ... to increase the city's resilience and environmental sustainability ... (ref 1) ... (The) pandemic has shown us the importance of nature in Bristol and the interconnectedness of our ecosystem.

(In 2021) ... Citywide activity launched to engage citizens on pathways to achieving Bristol's 2030 climate and ecological goals.. Ensure community and business led nature-based solutions are delivering multiple benefits e.g. improving habitats and reduce flooding and pollution across the West of England.

(By) 2024 ... Wildlife-friendly food growing areas have been established in every ward in the city, using regenerative approaches to replenish the soil and manage water.

(By) 2028 ... There has been a sustained increase in public engagement with biodiversity, with conservation volunteering and pro-environmental behaviours widespread.

(by) 2030 ... 30% of land in the city is managed for nature ...

(By) 2033 ... Bristol is supporting a wider range of wildlife, with the return of species such as pine marten, red kite and beavers

(By) 2034 ... 20% of food consumed in the city comes from sustainable producers in the city region

(By) 2035 ... Tree canopy cover has increased by a 25% since 2018

(By) 2036 ... Bristol's inclusive approach to tackling the climate and ecological emergencies is recognised as world-leading. Bristol's urban biodiversity and habitats are a key highlight of the city's tourism industry.

(By) 2037 ... There is a significant increase in the number of urban farmers and volume of urban food produced for local markets and communities. The long-term decline in the number of bees and pollinating insects has been reversed following identification and protection of key populations and habitats. As a result of measures taken to address the climate and ecological emergencies, health outcomes have improved in every ward.

(By) 2038 ... 100% of all suitable council owned land is now used for local food production.

(By) 2039 ... food shops, including supermarkets, are stocked with local food to reduce food miles and improve local food resilience. 'Nature is important for our existence and we need it to help manage our physical and mental health as well as our wellbeing.' - Birdgirl (Mya-Rose Craig)

(By) 2041 ... Everyone has access to excellent quality green space within a 10-minute walk from their home.

(By) 2044 ... The abundance of wildlife has doubled compared to 2018 levels.

(By) 2045 ... Tree canopy cover has doubled since 2018.

(By) 2047 ... Bristol's ecological habitats and biodiversity are at levels never seen before in the city and amongst the best for any urban environment globally.

(By) 2049 ... 50% of land across the Bristol city region is managed for the benefit of wildlife and Bristol is playing an active role in wildlife management across the South West. It's 2050 and Bristol is a sustainable city, with a low impact on our planet and a healthy environment for all. Across the city ... tree canopy provides shade, and the birdsong is lively. ... Bristol has become a ... nature rich and climate resilient city Bristol will have an abundance of wildlife, all people will benefit from healthy natural environment. (ref 1)