
DESTINATION TWEED – POLLINATORS ALONG THE TWEED PROJECT

Report by Service Director Assets & Infrastructure

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

17 AUGUST 2021

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report proposes that Scottish Borders Council supports and works in partnership to help deliver the proposed 'Pollinators along the Tweed' Project being developed by Tweed Forum in partnership with Buglife. The project comes under the auspices of the 'Destination Tweed' project, a series of interconnected schemes and proposals along the entire length of the River Tweed that is being developed by Tweed Forum, Scottish Borders Council and other partners. Destination Tweed includes the 100 mile Tweed Trail recreational route starting beyond the Tweed source near Moffat out to sea, with associated ecological and cultural projects of which this is one.**
- 1.2 The report sets out the context, aims and objectives of the project as well as the anticipated funding bid by Tweed Forum to the Heritage Lottery Fund and the required commitment from Scottish Borders Council that is integral.
- 1.3 'Pollinators along the Tweed' aims to create and enhance pollinator habitats along the River Tweed corridor, involving local communities in the creation and management of those habitats. Opportunities in the wider countryside will also be explored. This will help to deliver the Scottish Pollinator Strategy which is part of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. Tweed Forum aim to submit a funding bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in November 2021 with delivery of the project programmed to start in April 2022. As part of this, Scottish Borders Council will be required to commit to a 10 year management plan, as set out in this paper.
- 1.4 Supporting biodiversity and sustaining habitat networks is a key component of climate change adaptation and mitigation.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that the Executive Committee:-

- (a) agree in principle to Scottish Borders Council signing up to the 10 year management plan and consider future resource implications within the Parks & Environment Service.**
- (b) agree to the further exploration of possible funding streams to roll out this approach across the region as outlined in 6.7.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The aim of 'Pollinators along the Tweed' is to create a network for nature on the River Tweed B-Line (2km wide corridors either side of the river) by increasing the area of wildflower-rich grasslands and restoring habitat connectivity. The project will engage with Scottish Borders Council, landowners and communities in the creation, restoration and enhancement of sites for pollinators in villages and towns along the River Tweed (those outside the Scottish Borders region marked in italics); *Biggar*, *Peebles*, *Innerleithen*, *Selkirk*, *Galashiels*, *Tweedbank*, *Melrose*, *Newtown St Boswells*, *St Boswells*, *Kelso*, *Coldstream*, *Norham* and *Berwick-upon-Tweed*.
- 3.2 There will be a series of informative and exciting engagement activities with communities and visitors to the area that will raise awareness of the plight of our insect pollinators, about the project plans and proposals and what we can all do to help our pollinators thrive. Pollinators are essential to food production, and if current trends continue, we may not have enough wild pollinators for all the crops our growing population requires (<https://www.buglife.org.uk/bugs/featured-bugs/pollinators/> <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/savingbees>).
- 3.3 During the delivery phase, the project aims to create, restore and enhance up to 40 hectares of wildflower-rich habitat across a minimum of 50 sites within the extent of the project area, of which it is estimated around 33 will be on land owned and managed by Scottish Borders Council. Habitats created, restored and enhanced will provide forage and nesting sites for a range of pollinator species along these B-Lines.
- 3.4 B-Lines is a mapping exercise methodology that links existing areas of important habitat, eg. Sites of Special Scientific Interest, alongside smaller-scale features for pollinators. B-Lines is a Buglife initiative that has been used at a national and regional scale throughout the UK. NatureScot (one of Tweed Forum's partners) commissioned Buglife to produce a series of B-Lines maps for the 'Pollinators along the Tweed' project which forms a basis for the project.
- 3.5 During the pre-development phase and with funding from NatureScot (formerly SNH), Buglife identified a number of opportunities where sites could be enhanced for pollinators through habitat creation and enhancement and engagement with communities. Opportunities for engagement includes community groups (such as 'in Bloom' groups), Allotment groups, schools and churches. Opportunities for the creation and enhancement of sites for pollinators were identified at locations such as golf courses, public parks, schools and cemeteries.

4 PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 'Pollinators along the Tweed' has been granted funding for the development phase from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, NatureScot, Scottish Borders Council and Sustrans as part of the Destination Tweed project. A part-time Officer has been appointed during the development phase to work with the Council, the community and other landowners to identify sites for

the creation/enhancement of habitat for pollinators and to plan the work required in the delivery phase for each site.

- 4.2 The 'Pollinators along the Tweed' project is reliant on commitment from Scottish Borders Council, as a major stakeholder and steward of public greenspace, in signing up to a 10 year management plan of agreed sites across the project area. Council Officers within Parks & Environment have been working with Buglife and Tweed Forum on assessing proposals and the management and maintenance implications.
- 4.3 If the project is successful in securing funding, habitat creation and enhancement works will be implemented during the delivery phase which is expected to start in April 2022. Buglife will agree works with SBC and will make appropriate arrangements for contractors, timescales, materials, etc.
- 4.4 The proposals being developed include a range of changes in management and maintenance of greenspace within the Council's estate, including reduced grasscutting, increased cutting and lifting of arisings, changes to hedgerow maintenance and wildflower cultivation as well as reviewing rural roadside verge maintenance practices in select locations within the project area. This will all bring benefit to biodiversity along the River Tweed corridor and requires the Council's commitment to appropriate management and maintenance regimes.
- 4.5 Effective communication and engagement is recognised as a key component of this project. In order to ensure this achieved effectively, a Communication plan will be developed with Buglife and partners. This can link with the many related strategic Council agendas, including Placemaking, Participatory budgeting, the Climate Change Route Map and the Food Growing Strategy. Key to this will be articulating how we intend to manage our greenspace to contribute to enhancing quality of life for people who live, work and visit the Scottish Borders.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The project, if awarded grant funding, will bring biodiversity resources, expertise and community engagement into the River Tweed corridor throughout a 5 year delivery period. In return, under the 10 year management plan the Council will be committed to new management practices which will include a combination of less intensive grass mowing, cultivation of new flowering plants and different mowing practices (such as collecting arisings/new composting approaches) at selected sites. These sites will be predominantly centred on the relevant locations within the project area that have previously been identified (and subjected to consultation and Committee approval), as less intensively managed and are already promoted on the Council website as such;
https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/info/20013/environment/931/biodiversity_proposals_2019
- 5.2 The resource implications will depend on the management regimes that are agreed between Buglife, Tweed Forum and Scottish Borders Council. Some of these changes to management regimes will be accommodated within existing manpower and machinery available, however, some changes may require investment in machinery (increased capacity for cutting and lifting)

and staff training to raise skills and knowledge in support of the changed maintenance programmes - Buglife can deliver training on habitat management within the delivery phase.

- 5.3 In addition to the work undertaken by the Council in delivering this project within our estate, the 'Pollinators along the Tweed' project will be working with private landowners to develop larger tracts (c. 2ha) of third party land to support pollinators. The pollinator friendly sites proposed within the Council's green estate therefore would act as habitat corridors between these sites.
- 5.4 The Project will also include working with communities to further the aims of the project within community initiatives, and inviting communities to get involved. As such, by supporting this project through a 10 year management commitment Scottish Borders Council will also be supporting a wider network of biodiversity and community benefits.

6 OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

- 6.1 The success of this project is reliant on community buy in and support. Experience has taught us that not everyone welcomes changes in grass cutting within amenity areas. Scottish Borders Council would need to work with communities and Buglife to raise awareness around the emerging proposals on a site by site basis, promoting the critical nature of the changes to support biodiversity in the context of the climate change emergency.
- 6.2 As outlined at 4.5 a key consideration will be how best to engage with communities, identifying appropriate means of engagement and encouraging communities to get involved, such as in the management/maintenance of sites or by observing the wildlife in their local site.
- 6.3 As members will be aware, Scottish Borders Council undertook a review of operational activities in greenspace management in 2018. As a result, since 2018, several grass areas have already been identified where either no, or a single, cut is carried out resulting in beneficial habitat opportunities for a wider variety of biodiversity to exist. The Council are also already trialling a new regime of 'cut and lift' of grasscutting arisings (3 cuts per year) which is beneficial to the creation of impoverished soils which support the natural colonisation of pollinator friendly plants. In order to visualise how some of these changes will look in communities within the Pollinators along the Tweed Project area, some illustrative photos of these comparable sites are included in the Appendix. This project builds on this network of established sites and develops this approach, utilising the expertise of Buglife to guide our management of key sites.
- 6.4 The Council under The emerging Climate Change Route Map sets a clear context, and this project fits in with action NR1; *Utilise SBC greenspace and other publicly owned land to contribute positively to biodiversity and GHG emission reductions*. It also aligns with Scottish Borders LBAP actions GR1- *Enhance greenspace and green infrastructure in towns (including action GR1.5 Develop a new strategy for the management and enhancement of road verges and similar areas for the benefit of pollinators and other*

insects, including appropriate mowing regimes and improving plant diversity
https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/downloads/file/928/local_biodiversity_action_plan

- 6.5 Corporately and with the new Greenspace Programme Officer in post, this project could provide an opportunity to develop linkages and deliver outcomes across other agendas and Services. Potential opportunities include those within Education to develop engagement/promotion materials, support Learning for Sustainability across the curriculum and develop advocacy between young people their environment, specifically around the importance of pollinators to food security/production, biodiversity and climate change. Other opportunities may lie in supporting community capacity building within the Communities and Partnerships Service, supporting communities to get involved as stewards of their local environment, raising awareness and advocacy for change. Exploration of waste management and composting, working with Waste Services, may also be an opportunity.
- 6.6 Officers recognise that this project focusses on the Tweed corridor, which whilst encompassing a large area of the Scottish Borders region is not wholly inclusive. There are opportunities to apply these management principles on a wider scale across the region. As outlined above, Scottish Borders Council will need to ensure adequate skills and machinery are available to manage the pollinator sites appropriately. We will also have developed an improved understanding around effective community engagement and awareness raising. As a result, the Service may be better equipped to explore similar biodiversity enhancing practices in other areas (based on the B Lines network), bringing additionality from the project to the wider Council estate. This would require further funding, which if supported would require more in depth analysis of opportunities (e.g. Levelling Up).

7 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

The financial implications will depend on the management regimes agreed with Buglife, Tweed Forum and Scottish Borders Council. It is anticipated these will be primarily accommodated within existing budgets within Parks and Environment. Some investment in machinery may be required to allow for cutting and collecting arisings on a suitable scale. Requisite staff training and skills development may also incur some costs. It is proposed that a further detail will be provided on the financial implications in a future paper.

7.2 Risk and Mitigations

There are a number of risks of doing the project. Firstly, reputational risk to the Council – communities may not like the changes in greenspace management within the allocated sites and respond negatively. This would be mitigated through effective engagement and communication as proposed above and through implementing habitat creation/enhancements which are considerate of community use and support. Similarly there is a reputational risk in inaction – by not supporting this project and the partnership requirements, the Council may be perceived as not recognising and responding to the importance of this agenda to the public interest and the wider agendas of Climate Change and Biodiversity. This is mitigated by

ensuring that the project is achievable in terms of resource and financial implications to the Council.

There is a risk that some areas created and enhanced through the project are not managed appropriately and as agreed in the long term - for example wildflower-rich grasslands are cut early impacting the development and reseedling of flora and wiping out a valuable food source for pollinators. Mitigate through ensuring maps and management plans are shared with all groundsmen and they are engaged with the project.

There is a financial risk in the as yet unknown resource and financial implications (outlined at 7.1) as the project develops. However, this is mitigated by prudent project management and working with Buglife to ensure that all proposed management regimes are operationally deliverable and realistic.

7.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

The pollinator project will enrich key sites within the greenspace network with enhanced biodiversity. This will not directly impact on any specific user group. Employees of Scottish Borders Council may receive additional training to increase skills in managing these areas.

7.4 Sustainable Development Goals

The project would align with several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals;

- Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities – ensuring the habitat network within the Tweed corridor is sustained and enhanced, underpinning a more resilient ecosystem.
- Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production – reducing fuel consumption of grasscutting machinery, and associated carbon outputs
- Goal 13: Climate Action – reduced carbon outputs from machinery; enhanced environmental resilience and supporting our pollinators as a building block of the local ecosystem.
- Goal 15: Life on Land - taking action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats and work to halt the loss of biodiversity.

7.5 Climate Change

The project would present an opportunity to enhance carbon management through the reduced reliance on grasscutting machinery and frequency of cutting. It would also mitigate for biodiversity loss as a result of climate change, by actively reducing the degradation of natural habitats.

7.6 Rural Proofing

No rural proofing is required as this is not a new Policy or Strategy.

7.7 Data Protection Impact Statement

There are no personal data implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

7.8 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

There are no changes required to the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation as a result of the proposals in this report.

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 The Executive Director (Finance & Regulatory), the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Service Director HR & Communications, the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into this report.

Approved by

Name

Title

Author(s)

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Background Papers: none

Previous Minute Reference: none

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Carol Cooke can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

Contact us at carol.cooke@scotborders.gov.uk

Appendix - Photos



Longer grass with pollinator friendly species colonising – Bridgend Park, Kelso



Chirnside differential mowing creates longer grass / pollinator friendly species around tree planting



Longer grass management in cemeteries enables pollinator friendly species to colonise (Stow)