

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board  
**DATE:** 15<sup>th</sup> March 2007  
**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director – Environment  
**SUBJECT:** Review of Natural Assets Strategy  
**WARDS:** Borough-wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The current Natural Assets Strategy was approved in September 2000 and defines the Council's corporate policies for our trees, woodland, and nature conservation resource. The action programme of the Strategy has been implemented and a new replacement programme is proposed. The review also reflects the changes in the wider environment in which the Strategy operates, recent changes in legislation and highlights the success of the raised profile of Halton's natural environment.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

- (1) the review of the Natural Assets Strategy be approved by the Executive Board and published as a document available to the public;**
- (2) the policies and actions contained in the Natural Assets Strategy are noted by all Services and followed whenever any of the Council's activities would potentially impact on the natural environment;**
- (3) a public launch of the document to take place in 2007.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 The current Natural Assets Strategy is ready for review. Its work programme of 64 actions has been followed and reported over the last five years through the Quarterly Monitoring process and the Safe & Attractive Policy and Performance Board. In November 2005, the Board recognised the many and varied achievements of the Strategy and supported the recommended review process.

3.2 The Strategy is both a policy and action document and is as much about people as about the resources themselves. Halton's natural assets provide an attractive and interesting setting for work and leisure, with known social and health benefits towards raising the quality of life for local people.

3.3 Topics covered in the Strategy have been updated and include the effect of recent legislation changes. For instance, since October 2006,

section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act gives a specific duty to local authorities to consider biodiversity in the work that they do.

- 3.4 Through the actions in the strategy, there has been a marked increase in the environmental profile of Halton both locally and regionally. Initiatives such as the promotion of Local Nature Reserves have raised expectations amongst users and there is now solid community engagement in local environmental matters.
- 3.5 The Strategy has helped to bring about an increased awareness of the environmental value of trees and woodlands and, consequently, there have been significant improvements to the number of trees being successfully established, responsibly managed and legally protected. However, one shortcoming has been identified that needs to be addressed. This concerns the setting up of a system for regularly inspecting the health and safety of trees owned by the Council. The additional funding for this required survey work should be regarded as a high priority and found from existing budgets.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Strategy is set within the context of statutory land use policies in the existing Halton Unitary Development Plan. Its status in the emerging Local Development Framework will mirror its Supplementary Planning Guidance function and will be taken into account when deciding planning applications and appeals. The Strategy is a firm statement of the Council's corporate policies towards its natural resources and contributes to all of the five strategic themes in the Community Plan. It has been prepared in accordance with the key Urban Renewal objective to enhance, promote and celebrate the quality of the built and natural environment in Halton in the Council's Corporate Plan 2006-2011.

#### **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The actions proposed in the Strategy can be undertaken within the Council's existing budgets, or by making use of external sources of funding.
- 5.2 The policies and actions in the Natural Assets Strategy have been prepared against the backdrop of the Council's response to climate change, which will appear in a separate document.

#### **6.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

- 6.1 Failure to review the Natural Assets Strategy could result in a downturn to the natural environment improvements of the last five years. Failure to inspect trees on a regular basis could leave the Council vulnerable

to claims of negligence if an accident were to occur in circumstances that were foreseeable.

## **7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

7.1 There will be general equality and diversity benefits through a well managed natural environment.

## **8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
Natural Assets Strategy	Picow Farm Depot	John White, Paul Oldfield