

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 29 April 2026 at 6.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG

Present: Councillors M Boylan (Chair), H Morgan (Vice-Chair), S Handley, T L B Janke, L Lewis, H Rhodes, T J Nelson and P Thomas.

Also Present: Councillor C Healy (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning & Sustainability)

In Attendance: E Harvey (Lead Lawyer: Property & Commercial), P Starkey (Senior Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)), R Cook (Executive Director: Place), K Dewey (Ecology and Green Infrastructure Officer) and A Preece (Ecology & Green Infrastructure Specialist)

ENVSC18 Declarations of Interest

None.

ENVSC19 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 March 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

ENVSC20 Biodiversity Duty Report on 2025

The Ecology & Green Infrastructure Officer presented the Biodiversity Duty Monitoring Report setting out the Council's approach to meeting its statutory duties under the Environment Act 2021.

Members were advised that the report summarised actions taken between January 2023 and December 2025 and outlined plans for the next five years. The process required public authorities not only to conserve but also enhance biodiversity, supported by monitoring and reporting.

Officers explained that actions had been delivered across a range of service areas, including green space management, development planning and community engagement. Members heard that the report had been published by the statutory deadline of 26 March 2026.

A number of case studies were highlighted, including meadow creation at Boulton Grange and habitat enhancement at Bean Hill, which demonstrated both biodiversity benefits and potential cost savings through changes to land management practices.

Members were advised that Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements formed a key part of the duty. Whilst funding had been provided to support BNG delivery, the resource implications of monitoring and compliance remained uncertain and would continue to be reviewed as the programme matured.

In response to questions raised on the financial and resource implications of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), the Ecology & Green Infrastructure Officer explained that developer contributions included provision for long-term monitoring, although the overall scale of workload was still emerging and would continue to be monitored as schemes progressed.

Members sought further clarity on the delivery of habitat enhancements across the borough. Officers confirmed that improvements were taking place across a wide range of sites, including parks, nature reserves and amenity spaces, and were not limited solely to Green Flag locations.

Following a discussion on balancing biodiversity improvements with recreational use of green spaces, the Ecology & Green Infrastructure Officer highlighted the importance of adopting site-specific approaches. Members heard that careful consideration was given to how spaces were used, including dog walking, with an emphasis on community engagement and managing competing priorities.

Responding to questions raised on opportunities for increasing biodiversity planting, the Ecology & Green Infrastructure Officer noted that there was scope to expand wildflower planting, reduce mowing regimes and encourage greater community participation, whilst also recognising the need to manage public expectations regarding the visual appearance of such areas.

Responding to queries regarding innovative approaches to habitat creation, the Ecology & Green Infrastructure Officer highlighted the use of techniques such as green hay seeding, which could reduce costs while delivering effective ecological outcomes.

Following a number of questions raised on community involvement, Officers emphasised the importance of education, volunteer engagement and partnership working, including collaboration with Friends groups and local community organisations to support biodiversity initiatives.

The Committee noted that future monitoring would include the development of clearer performance measures and improved data systems, alongside consideration of whether more regular reporting would be beneficial.

The Committee welcomed the report and noted the progress made in delivering the Council's Biodiversity Duty.

ENVSC21 Update on Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

The Ecology & Green Infrastructure Specialist presented an update on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) following its adoption.

Members were informed that the LNRS formed part of a national initiative, with 48 strategies being developed across England to support nature recovery and biodiversity enhancement.

The Strategy had been developed in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders, including Natural England, landowners and environmental organisations. Extensive consultation had been undertaken, with strong levels of engagement across the borough.

It was reported that both Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council had formally adopted the Strategy, which had subsequently been published in April 2026.

Members were advised that the LNRS consisted of a statement of biodiversity priorities alongside an interactive mapping tool identifying areas of opportunity for habitat improvement.

The focus would now shift towards delivery, with the Strategy acting as a framework to guide activity rather than impose requirements on landowners. In response to questions raised on resourcing and delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), the Ecology & Green Infrastructure Specialist advised that delivery would not be the responsibility of the Council alone but would rely on partnership working with landowners, stakeholders and external organisations. It was noted that, whilst there was no direct funding attached to the LNRS, national and local funding streams were increasingly being aligned to its priorities, and opportunities to secure external funding were being actively explored.

Members sought clarity on the management of designated sites, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). The Ecology & Green Infrastructure Specialist explained that management plans were being developed and reviewed to ensure that sites were maintained or brought into favourable condition. Members heard that this work involved detailed monitoring, including factors such as water quality and habitat condition, alongside collaboration with Natural England and other partners.

The Ecology & Green Infrastructure Specialist outlined the challenges of managing competing priorities. Members noted that activities such as fishing, public access and land use needed to be carefully balanced with ecological outcomes, with particular reference made to issues such as water quality, vegetation management and species impact.

Responding to questions raised regarding the impact of climate change on trees and habitats, the Ecology & Green Infrastructure Specialist advised that the Council was taking a resilient approach to planting and habitat management. This included increasing species diversity, considering climate resilience in tree selection and responding to emerging pests and diseases, such as ash dieback, while also ensuring that Officers were supported with appropriate expertise and resources.

In response to questions raised on engagement with local communities and Town and Parish Councils, the Ecology & Green Infrastructure Specialist outlined the continued development of guidance and support to enable local

delivery. Members were informed that the Strategy promoted a “hyper-local” approach, encouraging community-led projects and providing practical tools to support local action.

Following a discussion on ensuring effective implementation of the LNRS, Officers highlighted the importance of maintaining stakeholder engagement and building momentum following adoption. It was noted that early delivery projects, improved communication and the development of local networks would be key to demonstrating outcomes and embedding the Strategy within wider decision-making processes.

The Committee welcomed the adoption of the Strategy and noted the progress made to date, recognising the importance of maintaining momentum as the focus shifted towards delivery.

ENVSC22 Work Programme Review

The Lead Lawyer: Property & Commercial presented the updated work programme.

Members were advised that, as this was the final meeting of the municipal year, any remaining items would be carried forward into the 2026/27 work programme.

The Committee was informed that future items would include a review of street waste and progress made following the introduction of dual recycling bins, alongside standing items such as an update on Climate Change and Adaptation which return on an annual basis.

Members were invited to submit any further suggestions for future topics prior to the work programme being presented to Scrutiny Management Board in June.

ENVSC23 Chair's Update

The Chair thanked Members and Officers for their contributions over the municipal year and acknowledged the breadth of work undertaken by the Committee.

The meeting ended at 7.36 pm

Chairman:

Date: Wednesday 8 July 2026