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## **BIOLOGICAL RECORDS INITIATIVE FOR ESSEX**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report seeks Members' views on a request from Essex County Council for an annual financial contribution towards the setting up and maintenance of an online biological record for Essex.

### **2 THE PROPOSAL**

- 2.1 Essex County Council is leading an initiative to set up an online resource of biological information for Essex. The aim of the project is to develop:-

- An inventory of available information and reports about protected species, landscape, etc.
- Maps of statutory and non-statutory designated sites and protected areas.
- Opportunity maps showing areas for enhancement of biodiversity.
- Species distribution maps.
- Information on local wildlife sites.
- Ancient Woodland Inventory maps.

- 2.2 The information collected will be stored electronically and will be accessible through a web interface.

- 2.3 In order to develop and maintain the data sets, the County Council is proposing to underwrite 25% of the revenue costs, but annual contributions are being sought from each district. A contribution of £4,456 is being sought from Rochford for the first year of the project and thereafter annually.

### **3 DISCUSSION**

- 3.1 In principle there is some value in creating an accessible Essex-wide biological record. However, it should be borne in mind that this proposal simply relates, certainly in its initial stages, to nothing more than a bringing together of information that already exists in one form or another.

- 3.2 In Rochford, for example, the boundaries of sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are well known; SSSIs are shown on the local plan proposals map, and it is difficult to see what advantage would be gained from this information being shown in yet another location.

- 3.3 The Council's Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) includes a chapter dealing with biodiversity and the information here must be monitored for the impact of new development. This is a matter that must be dealt with by Rochford District Council and it is difficult to see how maintaining information in an Essex-wide database would assist.
- 3.4 The Council maintains a record of information about local wildlife sites and these are linked to a protective policy in the local plan and shown on the proposals map. The Essex Wildlife Trust has been commissioned to review these sites for the baseline information accompanying the preparation of the Rochford Core Strategy.
- 3.5 Overall then, it is difficult to see what value the proposal would bring to Rochford other than a pulling together of biological information and its presentation through a web interface.

#### **4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There would be no impact on the protection of environmentally sensitive areas as a result of the creation of the Essex-wide Biological Record. Assessment of environmental impact of development, mitigation and/or creation of new habitat are central concerns of the planning process. Arrangements for annual monitoring of biodiversity are in place.

#### **5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The revenue contribution sought from Rochford is £4,456, a figure which would no doubt be increased on an annual basis. In addition, the calculated figure is predicated on a contribution being forthcoming from all districts; at present it is not known if this is the case.
- 5.2 The contribution being sought is an annual payment with no end date.

#### **6 RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That, subject to the views of Members, Essex County Council be advised that Rochford District Council does not wish to contribute to the Biological Records Initiative at this point in time.

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**Background Papers:-**

Letter from Essex County Council – January 2007

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