

## CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE

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**Date:** Tuesday, 13 June 2023

**Title:** Water Vole Recovery Plan

**Contact Officer:** Biodiversity and Green Spaces Officer - Carl Whitehead

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### Background

The Berks, Bucks & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust's (BBOWT's) Water Vole Recovery Project, the longest standing local project in the UK dedicated to water vole conservation, has continued to work to help the water vole populations in the three counties.

Working in partnership with the Environment Agency, the Canal & River Trust and Thames Water, they have been monitoring water voles, identifying habitat enhancement opportunities and influencing local landowners to manage sites sympathetically for water voles and implement mink control.

Their work has resulted in a continued increase in the known areas of local water vole activity. In 2018 the National Water Vole Mapping Project, to which the project contributes data, suggested water vole presence had declined by 30% between 2006 and 2015 across England and Wales. By contrast, their known water vole sites have been steadily increasing during this period. In 2008 the total area of water vole activity in the three counties stood at 321km<sup>2</sup>, this increased by 78% over the last 10 years to reach 603km<sup>2</sup> in 2018.

### Current Situation

#### American mink monitoring

Minks are an introduced predator that can decimate water vole populations. The project advocates the use of mink rafts to monitor and trap mink ready for disposal.

BBOWT work with landowners, providing equipment and trapping advice, and aim to install rafts at 1km intervals in and around our known water vole sites. This ensures that any mink travelling along the watercourse are quickly detected and the water vole populations are protected from predation.

The project is currently co-ordinating 190 mink rafts across the three counties and are looking to expand this in the Council's water vole key areas.

### **Environmental impact**

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

The loss of a native species to an invasive species on land in its ownership is something the council needs to be aware of and address, if appropriate

### **Risk**

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

The decision to cull mink, while endorsed by BBOWT to restore the population of water voles, may be viewed negatively by those who believe all animals have a right to live. Therefore, if agreed, the decision would need to be dealt with sensitively, clearly and the correct information must be given at all stages of monitoring and dealing with the mink.

### **Financial implications**

Described here or as stated in the report above.

➤ None, this is fully funded via BBOWT.

### **Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. To read the information from BBOWT <https://www.bbowt.org.uk/wildlife/wildlife-conservation/water-vole-recovery-project>
2. Be aware of the status of the mink and water voles and,
3. Look at the improvements in population in areas where this process has been carried out and,
4. Decide whether it is a worthwhile and suitable project for the town to be involved with.