

# **Subject: Proposal for a Rapporteur Review: Ensuring Biodiversity Protection and Enhancement in New Housing Developments**

**Report to: Housing Committee**

**Report of: Executive Director of Secretariat**

**Date: 5 July 2016**

**This report will be considered in public.**

## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 This report asks the Committee to agree to recommend the appointment of Leonie Cooper AM as a rapporteur to investigate the need for revised planning guidance to ensure biodiversity protection and enhancement in new housing developments.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 **That the Committee agrees, in principle, to recommend to the GLA Oversight Committee the appointment of Leonie Cooper AM as a rapporteur to carry out an investigation into the need for revised planning guidance to ensure biodiversity protection and enhancement in new housing developments.**
- 2.2 **That the Committee delegates authority to the Chair, in consultation with the party Group Lead Members, to agree a detailed scoping document, including terms of reference, for the investigation.**

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 The Mayor is proposing a substantial building effort to increase the number of homes for Londoners. This must be done while simultaneously protecting and enhancing the biodiversity of London. There is concern from wildlife charities that current planning guidance in the London Plan is unambitious for a city the size of London and that it focuses too heavily on the protection of existing biodiversity and does not properly promote mechanisms to enhance, increase and create new habitats.

## 4. Issues for Consideration

### Context for the review

4.1 The current London Plan states that development proposals should:

*a) wherever possible, make a positive contribution to the protection, enhancement, creation and management of biodiversity*

*b) Prioritise assisting in achieving targets in biodiversity action plans (BAPs), set out in Table 7.3, and/or improving access to nature in areas deficient in accessible wildlife sites*

*c) Not adversely affect the integrity of European sites and be resisted where they have significant adverse impact on European or nationally designated sites or on the population or conservation status of a protected species or a priority species or habitat identified in a UK, London or appropriate regional BAP or borough BAP.<sup>1</sup>*

4.2 At present, wildlife charities such as the Bat Conservation Trust, associations such as the London Beekeepers Association, tree experts such as the Woodland Trust or Forestry Commission and planting experts such as the Royal Horticultural Society complement the London Plan guidance by providing their own suggested guidelines for specific species and habitats. However creating a single set of guidelines applying to all forms of flora and fauna would provide a single directive for building developments to adhere to. This could enhance London's biodiversity and provide clear guidance to developers, so supporting the creation of new developments that provide not just homes for people, but an enhanced environment, including assisting with air pollution mitigation.

4.3 There are innovations in other cities that London could learn from. Cities such as Berlin, Malmö and Seattle, use the principle of "the green space factor" when considering new development proposals. This is where a calculation is carried out on the environmental impact of any given land use proposal and then that same sum is used to determine the extent of offsetting measures that are required in the development (such as green walls).<sup>2</sup> The rapporteur review will consider the value of such an initiative in London.

### *Proposed terms of reference for the review*

4.4 It is proposed that the review will:

- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of current guidance as set out in the London Plan and other Mayoral documents in promoting and enhancing biodiversity in new housing developments;
- Review best practice from other UK and foreign cities, including Malmö, Berlin and Seattle; and
- Establish whether providing one Supplementary Planning Guidance addendum to the new London Plan would more effectively promote and enhance biodiversity, in line with the local vernacular, and without affecting the viability of new housing developments.

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<sup>1</sup> The London Plan, Chapter 7 'London's Living Spaces and Places', [Policy 7.19 Biodiversity and Access to Nature](#), accessed 08.06.16

<sup>2</sup> [Berlin City Government – Urban Development and the Environment](#), available online here: <http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/umwelt/landschaftsplanung/bff/en/recht.shtml> 13.6.16

- 4.5 The review will adopt the following methodology:
- A selection of Mayoral planning decisions will be analysed to identify both good and poor practice examples of biodiversity enhancement and promotion;
  - A written call for evidence will be undertaken covering wildlife charities, academic experts, local neighbourhood planning forums, housing associations and providers, developers and other professional bodies such as the Environment Agency;
  - A set of roundtable discussions will be convened by the rapporteur; and
  - A literature review of best practice examples from UK and foreign cities will be undertaken.
- 4.6 The review is expected to run through the autumn after which a report will be produced for consideration by the Committee.
- 4.7 The Committee is recommended to delegate authority to the Chair, in consultation with the party Group Lead Members, to agree a detailed scoping paper for the review, including terms of reference and a project timetable.

## 5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Committee has the power to do what is recommended in this report.

## 6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 It is not anticipated that the proposal will require any additional expenditure, however any costs that do arise can be met from the Scrutiny Programme Budget 2016/17.

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**List of appendices to this report:** None

<b>Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985</b>
List of Background Papers: None
Contact Officer: Georgina Wells, Assistant Scrutiny Manager
Telephone: 020 7983 4510
Email: <a href="mailto:scrutiny@london.gov.uk">scrutiny@london.gov.uk</a>