

Project/Item Title	Developing Capacity in Open Space Development		Version	1
Corporate Head	Darren Williams	Service Area	Community Services	
Service Committee to Approve Budget	Community Services/Planning			
Anticipated Cost of Proposal (Capital)		Anticipated Cost Proposal (Revenue)		
To be completed for Projects only				
Type of Project		Project Duration		
Proposed Project Start Date		Proposed Project End Date		

Business Case Context

Background

Describe the purpose of the Business Case, what benefits are expected to be delivered or what problem will be solved (What is wrong with the status quo? What are the drivers for change?). Is the scheme a result of legal/statutory requirements or a stakeholder consultation?

With the recent departure of the Open Spaces Project Manager, there is a vacancy to be filled within Community Services where projects on Open Spaces are planned and coordinated with a particular emphasis on Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs). The current position has a dual responsibility to deliver conservation-based projects as well as those with an emphasis on recreation. For example, some key biodiversity objectives for this position would consist of delivering SANG management plans, advising on the development of the Council's Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy as well as the need to understand the provision of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). On the recreation side of the current role, there is an urgent need to develop a programme of play area replacements and it is felt that filling this vacancy with someone who could deliver these dual specialisms is extremely unlikely. Since the commencement of employment of the Open Spaces and Community Development Manager, there has been a close collaboration with Planning on a range of matters that have previously been under-developed, or which are new requirements in relation to the climate change and biodiversity agenda, for example collaboration on the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy, planning for Biodiversity Net Gain projects and developing a response to the proposed River Thames Scheme. It is proposed that two new posts could be created to have blended but specific approach to deliver mutual objectives.

In discussions with Officers within Planning, it has been recognised that this part of work carries a strategic importance and therefore grant funding which the Council has already received from DEFRA could be made available to supplement current staff budgets. With the impending need for developments to require 10% Biodiversity Net Gain, there is a need for ecological planning advice and Planning have access to two year's of grant funding to prepare for this new legislation that comes into force in November 2023. There is expected income to be gained through Biodiversity Net Gain (through selling biodiversity units from our own sites to developers to help them meet their BNG requirements). Though, if this is not realised after two years, there is a possibility efficiencies could be made elsewhere or make a decision around the future viability of the post to protect the Council from financial risk. This could include exploring making the post a shared post with a neighbouring Authority which would generate an income. Additionally, whilst it might be viable in two years time to deliver planning comments, to add this work at present might create an extra pressure and would be considered a high-risk strategy. Currently, biodiversity advice is outsourced to Surrey Wildlife Trust at an approximate cost to the Council of £12k per annum and officers believe that the existing agreement with SWT will not be sufficient to cover all of the new burdens associated with mandatory BNG from November 2023, as in reality SWT contract is mainly focussed on the provision of comments to the Development Management team on planning applications and does not go beyond this. It is proposed that using the current Project Manager vacancy within Community Services and the Biodiversity Net Gain grant given to the Council, a new permanent Biodiversity Officer post could be created to deliver ecological advice across the Council. The postholder will be recruited to deliver the SANG management plans, assist with the GBI strategy and contribute towards the delivery of initial Net Gain projects. This post could then, in future possibly provide biodiversity comments on planning applications once the current contract with Surrey Wildlife Trust has elapsed. At the end of the grant funding (no further funding is expected beyond the 2023/24 financial year), the officer might be in a position to deliver planning comments internally rather than rely on external consultants. Using another current vacancy within Community Development combined with a contribution from the existing Project Manager position both being used for the Biodiversity Officer post, then another position of Open Spaces Project Officer would be created to deliver the play and recreation projects required by the Council. This post would also be permanent but on a 30-hour per week contract based on current budget availability. Community Services see play and recreation as a Community Development function rather than that of Green Spaces, but the two are interdependent. The separation of the current Project Manager position creates dual specialisms to the Council at a significantly lower initial cost given the Net Gain grant available over the next two years. Beyond that, it is expected that Net Gain income could further fund this role in addition to a lower reliance on consultants to deliver the core work of the Council and this cost being reduced or possibly removed altogether. This proposal highlights the availability of government funding to deliver objectives with an invest to save option as it is entirely possible that in the near future, a Biodiversity Officer role is going to be necessary to deliver the outcomes of the Environment Bill (2021).

Strategic Links - relate this Business Case to RBC Corporate Strategies and Corporate Values

Corporate Strategies	Describe how this Business Case meets / contributes to the Corporate Business Plan through each of the Corporate Strategies. <i>- Delete those not applicable</i>
Climate Change Strategy <i>Reducing Carbon emissions from the Council's operations and the wider Runnymede community.</i>	By having a dedicated ecologist, the Borough will have more conservation input to strategies and plans that can realise biodiversity potential. This would also be a demonstrable commitment to the conservation of biodiversity by the Council, and the delivery of the Council's wider Climate Change Strategy which seeks 'to drive biodiversity net gain and protect our natural assets' as part of its mission.
Organisational Development Strategy <i>Enable Officers and Members to perform their duties to the best of their ability and make Runnymede Borough Council the employer of choice for local people.</i>	Currently, ecological advice is outsourced to external consultants, but by ceating an in-house provision, the process by which the Council seeks expert opinon in relation to open spaces management, planning developments and strategies would become more flexible and efficient. An in-house resource would mean that policies relating to SANGs and BNG could be produced more efficiently without having to rely on Surrey County Council (SCC) or consultants to provide advice, surveys or coordination of resources. Furthermore, by creating two specialist roles within Community Services, the Council is more able to deliver dual objectives that would otherwise be covered by one officer working across specialist areas.
Economic Development Strategy <i>Ensuring that the Borough continues to be a leading economy in Surrey and the wider sub-region.</i>	Currently, local authorities neighbouring Runnymede such as Surrey Heath or Elmbridge do not have a dedicated ecologist and so rely on SCC or consultants. Therefore, with Runnymede having its own dedicated officer would make it leading the way locally in terms of dedication to biodiversity.
Empowering the Community Strategy <i>Evidence Based Decision Making, Listening to residents, Enabling Communities to help themselves and to take control of services or plans for their areas, Working effectively with partner organisations, Dealing with inequalities.</i>	A dedicated ecologist would be available to the local communities within Runnymede to advise on ecological or conservation matters. This would raise awareness of biodiversity issues within communities whilst also conserving nature in local areas. Furthermore, it could create more ownership of green spaces and land within communities by creating a sense of ownership where projects around biodiversity are supported.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy <i>Support the delivery of a range of services and functions to improve outcomes for residents and their quality of life.</i>	Both proposed new posts would work collaboratively to deliver individual site development plans which when realised will have a positive impact of the health of our residents which will go towards point two of the health and wellbeing strategy.
Corporate Values	Describe where this Business Case fits in our Corporate Values - Delete those not applicable
Passionate – we will empower our staff to be passionate about all we do.	Recruiting an officer working across multiple departments dedicated to biodiversity and conservation would bring a passion for wildlife to the Council. This would also be a demonstrable commitment to the environment and the climate change agenda as well as to the Council's climate change strategy
Innovative – we will aim to creatively improve our services and be open to new ways of providing services.	By creating an innovative solution to a joint need between departments, we can show what can be achieved through collaboration and by creating less of a reliance on external consultants which leads to greater efficiencies. This collaborative approach is an innovative way forward for the Council
Delivering excellent value for money – we will strive to be as efficient and effective as possible.	Creating a new post that could bring less reliance on external consultants in the future can deliver more value for money by removing external consultants who are costly unless they have a very limited scope and bringing it in-house to create a more diverse post with more flexibility. Furthermore, by utilising an existing grant, the Council is able to create a new post to deliver core objectives for the Council at a reduced cost. There are also opportunities to reduce the amount the Council spends on external consultants if the right person is appointed.
Collaborative – we will work together and with others to deliver positive outcomes for our communities.	By creating a new post that delivers objectives for more than one department shows great collaboration. An officer would be delivering objectives across the organisation, supporting the development of plans and strategies that benefit the whole Council.
Strategic Links - relate this Business Case to RBC Corporate Strategies and Corporate Values	
Recruiting a dedicated biodiversity officer would demonstrate the council's commitment to biodiversity in the climate change strategy. The proposals related to SANG management, Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and Biodiversity Net Gain have major implications for delivering the vision and objectives of the 2030 Local Plan and determination of planning applications. The recreation objectives align with the Corporate Business Plan, particularly around the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and the role that this will play in providing residents with leisure and recreational spaces. The biodiversity officer will have a key role to play in delivering the climate change strategy and the Open Spaces Project Officer will focus on the health and wellbeing strategy but will complement each other.	
List the Constraints or Parameters in which this Business Case will operate	
This business case operates as a collaboration between Community Services and Planning. A new post would be created to support mandatory requirements for both services and an efficiency for the Council. One of the potential constraints will be if there is a need to recruit on a short-term contract, this will limit the quality of applicants and/or result in the potential inability to recruit.	
List the Outcomes and Benefits (including efficiency gains) you expect the scheme to achieve	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Opportunity to invest to save – there is an opportunity to recruit a dedicated biodiversity post for the Council using available grant funding •Currently there is a real need within the Council for creation of SANG site plans, Identification of Biodiversity Net Gain opportunities as well as site specific development plans for parks and open spaces. •Having a post operating across services would create an invest to save opportunity leading to an efficiency where multiple objectives required by the Council can be delivered more efficiently if a greater level of collaboration is achieved. •A Biodiversity Officer would be able to support the production of multiple strategies for the Council, such as the GBI and BNG Strategies. •It would create less of a reliance on external consultants which under existing contract arrangements will be insufficient to assist the Council deliver all the different aspects of the new national mandatory BNG burdens. <p>Without recruiting an ecologist, the Council is likely to be unprepared for the new legislative requirements which will come into force in November 2023. Recruiting this post also offers the possibility to remove reliance on external consultants in the future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •By separating responsibilities between two roles and using a grant to partly fund it, there would be less of a risk in recruiting to a vacancy that currently requires two specialisms in terms of subject knowledge and experience. 	
Appraisal of Business Options (must include evaluation of a 'do nothing' option)	
Option 1 (preferred option): For approval to be given to use BNG grant and funding for current position to create a new position of Biodiversity Officer. Currently, there is no biodiversity specialist employed by the Council and any advice is outsourced using consultants. This post would be recruited alongside an Open Spaces Project Officer and the two would work in tandem across specialisms. By having two officers will deliver more specific work rather than rely on one person to deliver different skill sets. Given the workload concerning biodiversity advice is currently increasing, there is now a need for a provision to be provided in-house. Now that the most relevant position is now vacant, there is an opportunity to slightly modify the structure to employ an officer to contribute towards important strategic functions to be delivered by the Council. Furthermore, with the availability of funding from within the Planning department, there now exists an opportunity to employ two new members of staff as an invest to save option.	
Option 2 (Temporary Contracts): The second option would be to utilise the recruitment opportunities mentioned in Option 1 but to do so with temporary contracts. Either post could be offered as a temporary post but the risk for this option would be a lack of qualified candidates who need the security of permanent contracts. Given the strategic need of qualified officers in posts relating to biodiversity and recreation, the long-term nature of the requirements in the Environment Act 2021, and the importance that both form part of the wider strategies of the Council, it is advised that offering permanent posts is preferable in these circumstances.	
Option 3 (Do Nothing): The 'do nothing' approach would be to employ a new officer on the existing staff structure, in this case, an Open Spaces Project Manager. This post serves an important purpose within Community Services to deliver enhancement projects with emphases on recreation and biodiversity but there is a real risk that employing someone with dual specialisms would be very unlikely. This option also fails to realise the opportunity presented by the availability of funding from the Planning Department and the likely future need to secure for ecological advice to obtain Net Gain funding for projects within the Borough to meet new legislative requirements associated with the Environment Act 2021.	
<p style="text-align: center;">innovative – we will aim to creatively improve our services and be open to new ways of providing services.</p>	
Benefits (comparison to other options considered): Ecological advice is now frequently required within the Council, particularly to comply with upcoming planning legislation and the immediate need to produce plans centered around biodiversity and conservation, and also to deliver local and national climate change targets. Currently, it is inefficient to rely on external organisations such as Surrey Wildlife Trust and Surrey County Council to deliver this on behalf of Runnymede Borough Council. Therefore, whilst we will focus on the on the current priorities mentioned above, in the longer term there could be less of a reliance on external organisations to provide advice to council in the future. Consider any tangible benefits of the Preferred Option, consider benefits such as income generation, savings, great efficiency, compliance with legislation / industry standards – soft benefits, reputation, residents' satisfaction, perception of Council	
Advantages to Service Area (preferred option)	Disadvantages to Service Area (preferred option)
Greater efficiency and collaboration in delivering biodiversity and SANG objectives. Also this could lead to less of a reliance on external consultants and less risk in recruitment exercise of not requiring a candidate with two different knowledge sets.	Given it is a collaborative project, agreement would need to be reached on priorities at the outset to deliver a constant collaborative approach.
Costs to Organisation (preferred option)	Benefits to Organisation (preferred option)
Using available grant funding and current vacancies there is little cost to the Council and could, in time generate an efficiency from not requiring consultancy fees in the future. However, it is acknowledged that there could be a small risk to the financial contributions towards the post if biodiversity net gain funding is not achieved at the expected levels.	Collaborative projects will create a good example to other departments of what can be achieved where departments work together for shared goals. Also a dedicated ecologist can be used throughout the organisation to promote biodiversity in all objectives and strategies.

Environmental Sustainability Benefits (direct and indirect benefits to support Climate Change Strategy)
 Outline any direct and indirect benefits of the Preferred Option that aims to minimise negative and promote positive environmental impacts and/or reduce carbon emissions, where possible

Direct Environmental Sustainability Benefits (preferred option)	Indirect Environmental Sustainability Benefits (preferred option)
By having an officer dedicated to biodiversity there will be more awareness of the subject within the Council by having expertise employed directly. This officer could serve other departments with ecological advice and support the development of future strategies with direct input for conserving wildlife. An ecologist would efficiently and directly advocate for Biodiversity Net Gain on behalf of the Council.	The indirect effect of this would be that other Councils might need to follow suit and employ ecological experts directly to satisfy their commitments. The future benefit that this could bring with more biodiversity focus could be large. By there being a wider focus there could be a wider Surrey focus that could benefit Runnymede.

Negative Environmental Impacts
 No direct negative environmental impacts anticipated.

Resource Requirements
Staffing Appraisal (preferred option):
 Outline the expected staffing / resourcing requirements for the preferred option in the table below, think about resources required in your team and others. This should include job titles, number of hours worked and salary.

Existing Staffing	New RBC Staff Requested	New External Staff Requested
Open Spaces Project Manager (vacant) 37 hours at grade 9 Community Development Officer (vacant) 30 hours at grade 8	Biodiversity Officer - 37 hours at grade 10 Community Development Officer -Open Spaces - 30 hours at grade 8	N/A

Add any costs into the financial appraisal table.

FINANCIAL APPRAISAL

Finance Appraisal (preferred option) - To be completed with the Finance Department:
 Describe the financial and resource implications of this option. See Financial Appraisal below to capture numbers.
 How will it be financed? Is a Supplementary Revenue Estimate required? Can it be resourced via a Virement (including areas other than your own)?
 Is there other funding available? Has funding been agreed? Demonstrate how the council can receive a return on investment, whether cashable, cost avoidance or quantifying tangible benefits –
Seek advice from your accountant. Business cases will not be considered by the Chief Executive unless a full financial appraisal has been agreed by the Accountancy Team.

Explain how the cost estimate has been drawn up e.g. based on the costs of a similar project/item; based on quotes from suppliers etc:	Based on RBC salary scales and comparable roles internally and advertisements for similar roles in neighbouring authorities
Please explain how you have considered the VAT implications of the project/item:	VAT does not apply as this business case relates to salary only
If this project involves building or refurbishment work within corporate assets has the project/work been consulted on and agreed by the Corporate Head of Strategic Land and Property Assets? Please give details.	N/A

CAPITAL COSTS

Capital Expenditure (specify codes required)	Year 1 (£)	Year 2 (£)	Year 3 (£)	Year 4 (£)	Year 5 (£)	Year 6 (£)
Total Capital Expenditure	-	-	-	-	-	-

Capital Income (specify codes required)	Year 1 (£)	Year 2 (£)	Year 3 (£)	Year 4 (£)	Year 5 (£)	Year 6 (£)
Total Capital Income	-	-	-	-	-	-

Net Capital Outlay	-	-	-	-	-	-
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Estimated Useful Life of the Asset: Where the expected lives of each significant component of the asset are different (i.e. buying a house with a flat roof) you must estimate both the useful life and cost of replacing each component part. Please only include components greater than £20,000 in cost or more than 20% of the total value of the asset.	Estimated Value (£)	Estimated Life (yrs)
Overall asset	(basis of estimation)	
Component 1 (specify):		
Component 2 (specify):		
Component 3 (specify):		

REVENUE COSTS						
Revenue Expenditure (specify codes required)	Year 1 (£)	Year 2 (£)	Year 3 (£)	Year 4 (£)	Year 5 (£)	Year 6 (£)
Biodiversity Officer 37 hours at top of grade 10 including 28.5% on costs	49,185	49,185	49,185	49,185	49,185	49,185
Open Spaces Project Officer 30 hours at top of grade 8 including 28.5% on costs	32,366	32,366	32,366	32,366	32,366	32,366
IT costs relating to equipment (to be sourced from current budgets)	1,000	-	-	-	-	-
Less: Savings to existing budget (Please specify)						
Community Development Officer 30 hours at top of grade 8 including 28.5% on costs	- 32,366	- 32,366	- 32,366	- 32,366	- 32,366	- 32,366
Open Spaces Officer 37 hours at top of grade 9 including 28.5% on costs	- 44,299	- 44,299	- 44,299	- 44,299	- 44,299	- 44,299
Total Revenue Expenditure	5,886	4,886	4,886	4,886	4,886	4,886

Revenue Income (specify codes required)	Year 1 (£)	Year 2 (£)	Year 3 (£)	Year 4 (£)	Year 5 (£)	Year 6 (£)
Grant Income	9,000	9,000	-	-	-	-
No Grant Income	-	-				
Potential to sell services to other authorities						
Total Revenue Income	9,000	9,000	-	-	-	-
Net change to revenue budgets	-3,114	-4,114	4,886	4,886	4,886	4,886

Business Case / Risks <i>Outline the risks (Managerial, Financial, Operational etc.) to RBC if delivering the preferred option. A risk summary only is required here.</i>	
Risk Description	Mitigation / Help needed
The recruitment exercise fails to attract suitable applicant	As a result of failing to recruit suitable applicants, projects are delayed. Resource is required from within PMO to supplement lack of resource. Interim support has been offered but recognised as being likely for a limited period only
The recruitment exercise fails and no suitable candidate is identified	Therefore further consideration of viability of post in consultation with CLT and could revert to do nothing approach as mentioned above if absolutely necessary
There is a risk that by bringing more resource in-house that higher levels of work are then brought in with the impression that more resource exists to do more work. This could lead to higher stress levels and possible burnout amongst staff.	Workloads and progress would be carefully managed to ensure that they are kept within manageable limits. Increasing numbers of objectives would be done through consultation and collaboration between departments.
Potential income streams from Biodiversity Net Gain are not realised within the two year period resulting in a shortfall against in the budget for the Biodiversity Officer post	Efficiencies would be sought in conjunction with Planning to justify expenditure. If no alternative funding is identified then staffing structure would then be reviewed
Impact <i>Consider the impact of the Business Case on the Organisation / Environment / Technology / Commercialisation / Cultural / HR</i>	

Option 3 (rejected option)	
Description It was considered to employ a direct replacement for the outgoing Open Spaces Project Manager. The likelihood of employing a suitably skilled officer that can deliver parks and recreation strategies, play and recreation infrastructure as well as being skilled in ecological management is low. Having considered the option jointly with planning, the option is deemed to provide the Council with a blend of skills and capacity to support multiple liked agendas.	
Advantages to Service Area (rejected option)	Disadvantages to Service Area (rejected option)
By keeping the status quo, the disruption to the current structure would be minimal and avoid the potential shortfall in salary budget should future funding not be realised through Biodiversity Net Gain.	The risk of not being able to complete multiple objectives requiring different knowledge and experience is excessive. Furthermore, not having the expertise in Biodiversity within the Council could impact the objectives of Planning Policy and result in incurring additional cost.
Costs to Organisation (rejected option)	Benefits to Organisation (rejected option)
The costs of external consultants to continue to rise especially if the Council requires them to assist with additional aspects related to BNG. Plus there is a risk that increases in workload to deliver strategies such as the GBI Strategy and SANG management strategies simultaneously could see the delivery and implementation of these important strategies delayed. Without a GBI strategy in place, and no local BNG projects identified, if developers need to rely on off site projects to deliver their mandatory 10% BNG requirements, this could see these benefits being lost outside the Borough.	By keeping the current arrangements, officers are aware of procedures and disruption could be kept low. However this benefit will be offset by limitations within the role r.e. expectations and capacity within the role.

Authorisation			
Approved by Corporate Head of Finance		Date	
Approved by Corporate Leadership Team		Date	Priority Score
Corporate Leadership Team Feedback			
Taken to Corporate Property & Acquisitions Member Working Group / Services and Digital Transformation Working Party (Where applicable)		Date	
Committee Report to be presented to:		Date	