

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
Recreation & Leisure Committee
5 MARCH 2025

Officer: Helen Ball – Town Clerk

BEAVERS RELEASE AT OLD RIVER BED SITE

Introduction

After years of planning, Shrewsbury Town Council, in collaboration with Shropshire Wildlife Trust, has successfully reintroduced beavers to Shrewsbury. These remarkable ecosystem engineers have now settled into their new home at the Old River Bed Nature Reserve. The release of the beavers is a significant step forward in wetland restoration and biodiversity conservation efforts in the region.

The project is aligned with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), a framework aimed at enhancing the recovery of nature across the local landscape. The beaver reintroduction supports the Shropshire Biodiversity Strategy, which outlines a commitment to improving biodiversity, enhancing wildlife habitats, and addressing climate change through natural processes.

This initiative involved the introduction of two adult beavers, a male and female, relocated from Scotland. This five-year trial aims to assess the impact of these keystone species on wetland habitats. The Old River Bed site, owned by Shrewsbury Town Council, is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is protected for its wetland plant species, though it faces threats from invasive vegetation. The beavers will play a crucial role in restoring the habitat and improving its overall ecological health, aligning with the LNRS's goals of habitat restoration and biodiversity enhancement.

Benefits

The reintroduction of beavers to the Old River Bed Nature Reserve brings several significant benefits, both for the local ecosystem and the broader environment, with a strong alignment to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and its biodiversity commitment. These include:

1. **Wetland Restoration:** Beavers are natural ecosystem engineers who create and maintain wetland habitats through their dam-building and tree-felling activities. Their return will help to control the spread of invasive willow trees, improve water quality, and restore the balance of the wetland ecosystem. This action contributes to the LNRS's target of improving water management and enhancing wetland environments across Shropshire.

2. **Biodiversity Enhancement:** By improving wetland habitats, the beavers will support a wide range of plant and animal species. The restoration of this habitat will provide better conditions for native wildlife, fostering biodiversity. This aligns with the biodiversity commitment under the LNRS, which emphasizes the recovery of threatened species and the creation of more resilient, interconnected habitats.
3. **Sustainable Habitat Management:** Traditional methods of managing the site, such as tree removal and grazing, had become unsustainable. The beavers offer a more natural, sustainable solution by helping to manage vegetation and improve water flow in the area. This approach complements the LNRS's objectives to implement sustainable land and habitat management practices.
Community Engagement and Education: The project provides an opportunity for local communities to learn about the vital role of beavers in wetland ecosystems. The presence of the beavers will raise awareness and build understanding of conservation efforts, particularly in urban areas. This also supports the LNRS's goal of engaging local communities in conservation efforts and encouraging active participation in biodiversity recovery.
4. **Contributing to National Conservation Goals:** This project is part of a broader effort to reintroduce beavers to various locations across the UK. The successful reintroduction to Shrewsbury can serve as a model for similar initiatives, contributing to the restoration of nature across England, Scotland, and Wales. It also aligns with the broader national targets for biodiversity recovery, as laid out by the LNRS and government biodiversity action plans.

Conclusions

The successful reintroduction of beavers to Shrewsbury represents a significant achievement in local conservation efforts and fulfils a key part of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the region. Through a carefully planned and executed process, the beavers have been integrated into the Old River Bed Nature Reserve, where they will play an essential role in restoring the wetland ecosystem.

The benefits of this project extend beyond the immediate improvements to the site's habitat. The beavers' return offers long-term ecological advantages, supporting biodiversity and enhancing the resilience of the wetland ecosystem. This reintroduction is a direct contribution to the Shropshire Biodiversity Strategy, and will provide valuable lessons in managing and protecting natural habitats in urban and rural settings alike.

Additionally, the project fosters community engagement and builds confidence around beaver reintroduction in urban environments, contributing to a broader biodiversity commitment to restore nature and increase public awareness.

As the beavers settle into their new home, the public is encouraged to respect their space, allowing the animals to adapt with minimal disturbance. This project not only contributes to the recovery of the local environment but also serves as a vital step toward reversing the decline in England's wildlife. Through collaborative efforts, including the ongoing support of the Local Nature

Recovery Strategy, the Shropshire Beaver Project has the potential to influence future conservation projects and the restoration of wildlife habitats across the country.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted