

Kingston aims to be most biodiverse borough in London

By Josh Smith

Kingston Council's Biodiversity Action Plan has aimed to help protect local habitats and species, as well as introducing routes for wildlife to travel across the borough safely.

Elliot Newton, Kingston Council's Biodiversity Officer, says the plan is aimed at reversing the 'biodiversity crisis' that the UK and the rest of the world is facing.

One in six wildlife species is at risk of becoming extinct in the UK. According to The State of Nature Report, the main cause of this decline is human activities that cause habitat loss.

Work is already afoot locally. Chris Gardener, Head of Science at The Southeast River Trust, says that brown trout is locally extinct, but they are currently restoring the habitat so they can be reinstated.

Water voles, semi-aquat-



The water vole is under serious threat from habitat loss.

Photo: Simon Litten/ Shutterstock

ic rodents, were also locally extinct but have started to be reintroduced to the borough.

Newton said: "At a local level if we really want to engender change and have a wilder society we have to think 'what can we do here in Kingston to

improve biodiversity?'"

The most effective way of creating that change is by raising awareness of nature locally.

He said another way is by accepting ecologically friendly changes in our daily lives. Cutting grass shorter to

keep it looking tidy is ecologically damaging and "has really detrimental impacts for the wildlife population".

More wildflowers are also beneficial because they attract pollinators like bees and moths.

These insects help with food production by spreading pollen. The number of pollinators in the UK has fallen by 18% since 1970, according to The State of Nature Report.

Himali Patil of The Community Brain, a non-profit organisation that has partnered with Kingston Council as a part of the Biodiversity Action Plan, agreed that effective change "has to start from the grassroots".

However, she admitted that "people can only do so much" and that some onus must be put on local government.

"A lot of the things are in the council's hands," Patil said.

Newton agreed that governments around the world must step up to the challenge of protecting our environment.

"We need the highest governments to prioritise the health of our planet," he said.