

Landscape and Ecology Officer

Job Description

Job Purpose

We are looking to appoint a suitable qualified and experienced tree, ecological, and landscape officer, with experience in assessing, advising, and making recommendations on strategic planning matters and the impacts of development proposals in relation to ecology, biodiversity, and landscape matters. The officer would be expected to support the determination of planning applications (including pre-applications, discharges of conditions, appeals, and enforcement); support the introduction of mandatory biodiversity net gain (BNG) processes; support the development of the new local plan for the borough; and provide support to the council's approach to the DCO process for emerging NSIPs in the borough (including National Grid Norwich-to-Tilbury, and future expansions of Tilbury Port).

Key Service Accountabilities

The appointed officer is expected to provide specialist ecologist and landscape advice to both the development management service and the strategic planning service (including the emerging local plan). The appointed officer will:

- Assist the Council's Planning Officers with the making and updating of Tree Preservation Orders
- Provide consultation responses to the Council's Planning Officers to deal with applications for work to trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders and notifications for work to trees in Conservation Areas
- Provide specialist, balanced consultation responses on arboriculture, biodiversity, ecology and landscape matters for planning applications, pre-applications, discharge of conditions, appeals and enforcements
- Assess, advise, and make recommendations to Planning Officers in relation to the effect of development on trees, hedgerows, landscape features, and the wider landscape, as part of the Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) process with applicants
- Provide a specialist advice service to the Council officers, in respect of arboriculture, ecology, biodiversity, and landscape matters
- Where specifically necessary provide support to Planning Officers at Planning Committee in respect of arboriculture, ecology, biodiversity, and landscape matters
- Regularly contribute to planning surgeries and internal Development Management team meetings as requested
- Assist the Council's Planning Enforcement Officers to investigate and advise the Council on unauthorised works to protected trees, including attendance in Court as the Council's expert witness
- Act as the Council's expert witness at Planning Appeals and Inquiries concerning arboriculture, ecology, and landscape matters
- Comment on Section 106 Agreements relating to trees, ecology, biodiversity, and landscape matters

- Assist and advise the Council's Planning Officers on the assessment, implementation and enforcement of the Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) in relation to planning applications
- Assist the Council's Planning Officers in respect of arboriculture, ecology, biodiversity, and landscape matters (including visual impact) related to the development and adoption of Local Development Orders (including the London Gateway Distribution Park)
- Support the Council's Planning Officers in the implementation, assessment, monitoring and enforcement of Biodiversity Net Gain. This includes advising on the validation of assessments using the BNG Metric 4.0 (including the Small Sites metric), advising and commenting on Biodiversity Gain Plans, advising on the monitoring of BNG implementation including off-site contributions
- Provide an authoritative and competent landscape, ecology, biodiversity, and arboriculture service to the Council (excluding the management of landscape, ecology, and arboriculture contracts on Council owned land)
- Be responsible for an assessment of the contribution made by trees, hedgerows, and landscape features to the quality and character of the landscape to ensure the protection of trees and landscape features under relevant statutory legislation
- Provide specialist advice on arboriculture, biodiversity, ecology, and landscape matters in relation to development of the emerging Local Plan. This includes advising on the scope, brief and specification of required evidence base, and advising on strategic and detailed policies
- Advise and support the Council's Planning Officers in assessing and making recommendations on arboriculture, biodiversity, ecology, and landscape matters in relation to potential site allocations including the Local Plan PPA process
- Advise, engage, and make recommendations to the Council in terms of ecology, biodiversity and landscape matters relating to Gypsy & Traveller sites, evidence input into flood and coastal matters, and minerals and waste (including both policies and sites)
- Advise and support the Council's Planning Officers on Thurrock's role as a Supporting Authority to the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This would include attendance and contribution to working group meetings on the LNRS with the Essex Local Nature Partnership
- Advise, engage, and make representations in combination with the client council officers in response to consultations received from other local authorities and stakeholders relating to local plans, other strategies and relevant evidence reports. This would also include where appropriate giving evidence on behalf of the client at local plan examinations
- Regularly contribute to planning surgeries and internal Strategic Services team meetings as requested
- Support and provide specialist advice to the Council's Planning Officers in their liaison with statutory stakeholders including Natural England on strategic planning matters
- Support and provide specialist advice to the Council's Planning Officers in their liaison with the community, developers, applicants, and other external stakeholders in respect of trees, biodiversity, landscape, and other natural environment issues within the scope of strategic planning
- Advise and support the Council's Planning Officers in the implementation of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain, including:
 - advising and making recommendations on biodiversity evidence and policies (strategic and detailed) within the emerging Local Plan
 - supporting the development, adoption, and implementation of a Biodiversity Net Gain SPD

- advising and making recommendations to Council Officer's on habitat banks, priority projects, and the strategic delivery of off-site BNG within the borough, to support the Council's broader biodiversity priorities
- to undertake appropriate monitoring and support to Council Planning Officer's in assessing and compiling Thurrock Council's 5-yearly Biodiversity Report
- Advise on the monitoring and assessment of Thurrock Council's Local Wildlife Sites and Local Nature Reserves, including making recommendations on their review and ratification
- Advising and making recommendations to Council Planning Officers on existing and proposed statutory natural environment designations within Thurrock (SSSIs, SPAs, RAMSAR sites, ancient woodlands, etc) including liaison with the relevant statutory bodies and stakeholders
- Advise and make recommendations on the implementation of priority projects and objectives as confirmed in the Thurrock Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2022.

Requirements for this job

The appointed officer will:

- Hold a relevant qualification in ecology or a related subject
- Be a full member of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (IEEM)
- Be a practising ecologist, with significant experience in delivering ecology advice across the planning process on behalf of a Local Planning Authority
- Have experience in providing authoritative and competent arboriculture service to Local Planning Authorities (including assessment, the making and updating of Tree Preservation Orders, and enforcement in relation to unauthorised work on protected trees)
- Have experience in assisting Case / Planning Officers in making presentations to external parties (including Planning Inspectors) and Members (including at planning committee)
- Have an advanced understanding of the application of Planning legislation, National Planning Policy, guidance, and best practice in advising on applications/cases as part of the planning process assessing the likely effects of development proposals on species and habitats for biodiversity conservation, enhancement, or mitigation
- Have an advanced understanding and engagement with recent legislation and emerging regulations and statutory guidance associated with the Environment Act relating to the enhanced biodiversity duty, biodiversity net gain, local nature recovery strategies, and environmental outcome reports
- Significant experience in negotiating with developers/applicants on development proposals for biodiversity conservation, enhancement, or mitigation on behalf of the local authority, both within the Development Management process as well as part of the site allocation process within an emerging Local Plan
- Experience of communicating complex, technical and abstract information to multiple audiences concisely defending the Council's position on ecology, biodiversity, and landscape matters
- Ability to identify a broad range of plants, habitat types, and field signs
- In-depth experience and local knowledge on the ecology, biodiversity, and landscape of Thurrock
- Significant experience in assessing and/or production of clear and concise site management plans incorporating maps, pictures, and diagrams