Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan 2012
Non Technical Summary

Biodiversity is our most precious resource. The Earth's biological resources are vital to humanity's economic and social development. They provide the very systems that support our existence on this planet and are global assets of tremendous value to both present and future generations. We simply cannot live without a planet rich with biodiversity - we must protect it now and in the future.

Rotherham Biodiversity Forum partners published the first Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan (RBAP) in 2004. Based on the protection and enhancement of habitats and species prioritised both nationally and locally the plan provided a comprehensive assessment of the nature conservation value of the borough. The 2004 RBAP has been successful in enabling delivery of biodiversity action via targeted site management, project development, guiding survey and monitoring effort and also within the planning framework to highlight the need for habitat retention and enhancement. Since 2004 the national priorities for conservation action have been expanded and refined and new legislation and Government information has been published that will guide the next era of biodiversity delivery. It has been appropriate to review the RBAP to take stock of successes and constraints encountered to date and in light of the new thinking and increased Government focus.

This 2nd edition of the Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan builds on all the work of the previous decades to set Rotherham challenging, but necessary, new targets for the protection and restoration of the natural environment. The Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan 2012 identifies the priorities for the conservation and enhancement of Rotherham's biodiversity. It is the result of the work of Rotherham's Biodiversity Forum, a partnership of naturalists, landowners, conservationists and RMBC staff.

The over-riding principles of Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan delivery are as follows:

1. To maintain, enhance, expand and connect the biodiversity of Rotherham by:
    - protecting the natural populations and distribution of species;
    - conserving natural and semi-natural areas within which species can be maintained, and;
    - identifying opportunities for habitat creation, expansion and connection
2. To involve local people and develop effective partnerships to ensure that programmes for biodiversity conservation are successful and can be sustained in the long-term.
3. To contribute towards the conservation of UK and global biodiversity by monitoring actions and reporting to established systems.
4. To fully integrate biodiversity action as a central principle of the Rotherham Local Plan

A healthy natural environment contains a mosaic of wild and managed spaces where different plants and animals can find all they need to survive and have enough room to move and expand so that they can react and adapt to changes in climate and human impacts. Natural habitats are usually more diverse and can support many kinds of wildlife but semi-natural, landscaped and amenity open spaces are valuable and also support wildlife. All our wildlife will benefit from our efforts to keep, expand and connect open spaces.

A healthy natural environment makes human life possible and worth living; it provides food, fuel, clean air and water, medicine and climate regulation. These products are not just from exotic rainforests and remote jungles; Rotherham's woodlands and street trees help to keep our air clean, our agricultural products are pollinated by bees and other insects that need local woodlands, grasslands and wetlands to survive, our country parks and canals are great tourist attractions improving our local economies and employment levels, our urban parks and nature reserves provide free, healthy recreational and spiritual spaces improving our health, fitness and mental well-being.

To conserve and improve Rotherham's natural environment, and all the benefits we get from it, we need to follow the national approach of 'More – Bigger – Better – Joined'; we need to:

1. Improve the quality of current sites by better habitat management
2. Increase the amount and size of good wildlife sites
3. Enhance and create connections between sites, through physical corridors or through 'stepping stones'
4. Reduce pressures on wildlife by improving the wider environment, including through buffering wildlife sites.

The Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan 2012 will guide the delivery of these actions focusing on the conservation and expansion of natural habitats which will, in turn, support wildlife species protection. The following summaries outline Rotherham's key habitat groups:

Woodland Habitats
Woodlands covered by this action plan include all broadleaf semi-natural woodland and mixed broadleaf and coniferous plantations on former ancient semi-natural woodland sites. Also included are wet woodlands and woodland sites of more recent origin. Within Rotherham the most common types of lowland mixed deciduous woodland are Oak Birch woodland and Mixed Ash Woodland

Grassland Habitats
Grassland and heathland habitats are often found in mosaics that reflect small but significant changes in soil types and depths, hydrology and management activity. In Rotherham heathland in particular is difficult to separate from grassland as it is often found in small or frequent patches throughout a predominantly grassland site. Grassland habitats require some management intervention to maintain their composition and diversity and to prevent succession to scrub and woodland. Long-established semi-natural grassland is more diverse and stable but newly created sites based on naturalistic and priority habitat communities should be considered as important when making management decisions, which should be used to maintain their existence and enhance their diversity.

Water and Wetland Habitats
Standing and flowing water and habitats that result from temporary or permanent water levels support a wide diversity of plants and animals. They include natural and man-made systems but the key feature defining wetland ecology is the dynamic hydrologic regime, which dictates the chemical and physical character of each wetland feature. Water level fluctuations produce a cycle of disturbance and successional growth. Linear water features act as corridors for dispersal and larger streams and rivers will pass through different areas that produce different characteristics and nature conservation values.

The principal river catchments affecting Rotherham are the Don and Trent catchments. These catchments include the rivers Don, Rother and Dearne as well as a number of smaller rivers and streams such as Anston Brook, Whiston Brook, Maltby Dike, Ulley Brook and Hooton Brook. Much of the River Don and River Rother areas are densely populated and industrialized although the River Rother is of significant wildlife value, particularly for its ornithology, and its concentration of wetland sites and associated species.

Brownfield and Inland Rock Habitats
This plan is concerned with the vegetative habitats that occur on or result from inland rock and brownfield conditions and the faunal communities they support, particularly invertebrates. Bare ground and rock are important elements of semi-natural habitats as they provide features that certain species find essential or important at some stage of their lifecycle. Bare ground also enables us to consider natural processes and vegetation succession that are difficult to find elsewhere. In Rotherham rock and scree habitats are represented in both the Coal Measures and Magnesian Limestone character areas; they include natural rock outcrops as well as disused quarries.

Traditional Orchards
Traditional Orchards are defined as low intensity managed, low density groups of fruit or nut trees grown on vigorous rootstocks in permanent grassland. Cobnut plats are also included; Cobnuts which are a type of hazel are grown in a type of orchard known as a plat. The minimum size of a Traditional Orchard is defined as five trees with crown edges less than 20 metres apart. In the UK apples, pears, plums, damsons, cherries and quince are all grown in Traditional Orchards. There are currently 46 identified potential traditional orchard sites in Rotherham. The current condition of these orchards is unknown as further surveying is required.

Hedgerows
Hedgerows are an integral part of our landscape, comprising rows of closely-growing trees and shrubs and associated ground flora. They are linear features, which resemble woodland edge and scrub habitats; some have their origins in the woodland clearance of the 17th and 18th Centuries. All hedgerows in urban and rural areas are considered to be important assets; they are often highly diverse, reflect historic field boundaries and frequently form important green corridors. Hedgerows adjacent to green lanes, tracks and woods tend to be particularly rich.

The Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan 2012 Introduction and habitat group action plans are available at:
http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/info/1009/wildlife/946/biodiversity_action_plan