

Informal report V2 to WMPC Environment and Leisure Committee

For discussion on 12th February 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

This item has arisen following the requirements of parish councils to consider biodiversity and a discussion with Cllr Chenery last November. The requirements do not necessarily require formal policy but it would appear that fairly simple guidance and processes could be developed to ensure that WMPC are able to show that biodiversity is considered with its relevant roles and responsibilities.

2. STATUTORY DUTY

Public authorities who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. This is the strengthened 'biodiversity duty' that the Environment Act 2021 introduced.

From **Society of Local Council Clerks** guidance dated October 2023 attached:

'Under the 2021 Environment Act, public authorities (including town and parish councils) operating in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Government guidance published on 17 May 2023 clarifies that, as a public authority, town and parish councils must:

- consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- agree policies and specific objectives based on their consideration.
- act to deliver their policies and achieve their objectives.

Town and parish councils, unlike other authorities, are not obliged to publish a report on their actions, but the [Government guidance](#) requires all public authorities to complete their first consideration of what action to take for biodiversity by 1 January 2024.

They must agree their policies and objectives as soon as possible after this and must reconsider the selected actions within five years of completing their previous consideration, or more frequently if they choose'.

To comply with the guidance, town and parish councils could as a minimum:
have biodiversity as an agenda item for a meeting before the end of 2023.

note what action they are already taking to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

agree what further steps they should take to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

3. Context

The State of Nature (2019) report demonstrated that the abundance and distribution of the UK's species has, on average, continued to decline since 1970, and the rate of decline appears to be increasing. Intensive agriculture, climate change impacts, non-native invasive species and land-use changes have all been drivers of biodiversity decline. In 1992, the UK government signed up to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity which committed the UK to reversing the loss of biodiversity. Successive

governments have produced plans to stem and reverse the loss of biodiversity and have committed to higher targets to achieve this reversal. Measures to protect biodiversity include laws, such as the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) which protects species and habitats.

4. Relevant policy documents

NPPF Section 15 Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

Local Plan LDF 2020 Climate Change and Biodiversity Policies

ESC Biodiversity Net Gain Interim Planning Guidance Note May 2023

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach to development and associated land management that aims to leave biodiversity in a measurably better state than before.

SCC Suffolk's Nature Strategy 2020 Vision

Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan 2023 Policies WICK4 Provision for wildlife in new development. Community Actions and objectives: enhancement of green spaces, protecting trees, enhancement of parish through new plantings of trees and hedgerows, creating new meadows, woodland and orchards.

Transition Woodbridge Wildlife Corridors and Ipswich Wildlife Network

5. Actions linked to WMPC Climate Action Strategy (CAS)

There are several actions listed in the WMPC CAS which overlap with biodiversity measures. Examples are land use Item numbers 7, 8 and 9 and protection of trees and tree planting, enhancing green spaces, managing WMPC own land. These strategy items need refining to ensure they are workable, annual SMART targets may need to be set (Item number 3).

6. Parish Environment Group (PEG) activities via Green Gym

Informal PEG group has existing since 2000 but could be slightly more formalised. Green Gym activities are successful in terms of tree planting and management in village green spaces and private farmland. More funding from WMPC would be beneficial. Greenest County award and Telegraph national paper 'award' in 2012.

Two Tree Wardens (Westover and Exton) available for advice and coordinating activities.

Nest box volunteer (Exton) working to upgrade boxes in the Parish.

Footpaths Warden (Harrington) working to clear, upgrade, sign and clean village and parish footpaths.

7. WM Hedgehog Help (Cllr Fowler)

Excellent local group, source of invaluable advice, and promotion of this vulnerable species. Various advice notes produced and used regularly.

8. ESC/Cllr Noble Community Partnership Priorities 2024

A new priority has been created and agreed on 25th January 2024:

*Facilitate opportunities for local people to care for the **environment and biodiversity** (cross cutting theme with Mental Health and sharing knowledge)*

Connect groups, information and tips with local residents to increase interest in environmental care and care for biodiversity.

This may support some projects (if put forward by the community) with a specific environmental theme.

9. Parish initiatives to support residents via Wild About Wickham (WAW) initiative (under the CP)

Cllr Noble has initiated a first event supported by Woodbridge and local groups. This project is primarily aimed at residents, families and all ages to help people to support wildlife within their own patch and the village.

Ideally WMPC will support and engage with future events. I suggest a small organising group work with Cllr Noble/ESC to assist the work in enabling WAW activities to take place.

Any activity ideas are welcome.

Link up with next Climate Action group event?

10. Projects/topics where biodiversity and wildlife impacts should be high priority

WMPC need to consider impact on the species arising from their own activities. Parish activities might (and in some cases do) include:

Open spaces management through management plans and contract specifications.

Cemetery management, generally positive but always scope for further biodiversity measures and improvements.

Footpath and margins management including hedgerows. These create linear habitat corridors and have a role in providing biodiversity. Opportunities for promoting public engagement and education.

Allotment management and measures to protect wildlife (ideally the loss of any further hazel copse should be avoided).

Sustainable produce and materials (such as home-grown timber and trees) should be supported for projects.

Regular litter walks with volunteers. Additional support from WMPC support to help with green space, cemetery and pathway clean ups would be useful to avoid volunteers becoming over stretched.

Policies to promote and manage trees and woodland could be supported further in principle (managed woodland is great for carbon sequestration and funding sources are available).

Other areas/places where input from interested people *might* be welcome:

Churchyard management, link up with the PCC and ESC (closed churchyard)

Promote local food production and develop orchards.

Consider looking at specific targets, biodiversity action plan and vulnerable species and support for their habitat. Species such as swifts, barn owls, bats, grass snakes, otter, hedgehogs, wildflowers, native black poplar.

Further work with local landowners to promote landscape and habitat management.

Consider River Deben water quality, land use, celebrate our river valley. Possible link up with the River Deben Catchment Partnership (meetings attended in 2014), as well as effective link up with Ufford PC / Woodbridge TC on water quality testing.

Beeline initiatives, through trees, shrubs (add to car parks/link up with ESC), perennials, herbs in public garden areas (RC garden and war memorial garden), planters (four at VH). Funding and support for these smaller projects can be challenging to source.

ESC Cllr Noble proposes two 'Beeline' in the square around the Plane trees.

11. How can we all work more closely together to achieve more and to set out some simple processes/actions?

We are working on the ground with the community and have local knowledge. It would be useful to use this to greater effect.

I recommend that a simple process/action plan document be prepared listing agreed priorities. The document which might sit alongside the CAS.

Ref to the Society Local Council Clerks advice note

Anne Westover CMLI Landscape Architect and Tree Warden February 11th 2024