

PROPOSAL TO SUPPORT THE INCREASE OF HEDGEHOG FREEWAYS IN WICKHAM MARKET

As part of the national Hedgehog Highway project

Why help our British hedgehogs and why are they important?

- Hedgehogs are a gardener's friend, because they eat beetles, caterpillars, worms and other invertebrates you might not want, including snakes, so they help to keep your plants in great health.
- Our only prickly mammals are an important indicator species in conservation. Because hedgehogs feed on soil invertebrates, they act as a barometer for the health of our local environment. A successful population indicates a plentiful supply of invertebrates, diversity of habitat and connectivity of the natural environment. Where hedgehogs are in decline, as they are in the UK today, (rural East Anglia has lost over 70% since the millennium), this is an indicator of generally poor environmental health which will in time impact other species, including us humans.

Why are they decreasing?

- Fragmented habitat and lack of natural food sources are major factors. New builds building walls with no access and lack of cover or food for prey or predators.
- Flailing of hedgerows which leads to poor habitats for nesting.
- Reduction of biodiverse green spaces.
- Lack of foraging habitat due to over-zealous gardening.
- Use of pesticides which can limit food supply and poison a hedgehog when ingested.

What can we do?

- Hedgehogs travel around 1 mile and big males can travel up to 4 miles a night to find enough food and a mate. If you have an enclosed garden, you are inadvertently reducing the amount of land available to them to survive. One of the main reasons hedgehogs are struggling is because our fences and walls are becoming more secure.
- We can make their life easier by removing the barriers within our control; for example, by making holes in or under our fences and walls for them to pass through, making local nature routes between gardens. 13cm by 13cm square at ground level so hedgehogs can pass through is sufficient, but is too small for nearly all pets. If you have brick walls, remove a brick from the bottom, create a space under a gate or dig a small tunnel underneath to create safe corridors from your garden to the the next. This is an opportunity to work with your neighbours to encourage a more cohesive community.
- Some fencing companies supply ready made fencing and gravel boards with hedgehog/wildlife gaps. so opening up your garden is easy and beneficial. Let your lawn near access holes grow longer. Smaller creatures and hedgehogs all like to move through long grasses rather than out in the open.

How can we spread the news to promote this project?

- Please adopt this idea in your own gardens.
- Use our newsletter to encourage people to take part,
- Talk to the school, Hopkins Homes and local groups such as Brownies..
- Please talk to your neighbours, especially those with children and your own family.

Therefore, I seek the support of my fellow councillors to approve of the project, which will enable me to move forward in making our community more nature friendly. If successful, this may involve costs to help the school and local groups create these wildlife thoroughfares but will make a notable difference to our environment for the future of Wickham Market.

Regards,

Cllr. N. Fowler