

Blunham Parish Council

Biodiversity Policy – adopted 30th November 2023

Background

RESPONSE TO THE BIODIVERSITY DUTY 30 October 2023

INTRODUCTION - STATUTORY DUTY

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.

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.

Such steps may include:

- reviewing what biodiversity or nature recovery plans are already in place from other local authorities;
- making contact with local voluntary groups working on nature conservation;
- carrying out a biodiversity audit of council landholdings and/or the whole council area,
- working with the Church regarding conservation activities within the churchyard;
- drafting an action plan that covers action that the council will take itself as well as support for the actions of other local bodies.

Whatever action is agreed, as a minimum local councils could ensure they address biodiversity concerns when commenting on planning applications.

All these steps may inform an agreed biodiversity policy below.

BACKGROUND

MODEL BIODIVERSITY POLICY

In accordance with the duty imposed on town and parish councils by Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, updated by Section 102 of the Environment Act 2021, Blunham Parish Council (hereinafter referred to as the Council) which has any functions exercisable in relation to England must from time to time consider what action the authority can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective.

This duty also means that town and parish councils can spend funds in conserving biodiversity.

DEFINITION

According to Defra (Biodiversity 2020), biodiversity is the variety of all life on Earth. It includes all species of animals and plants – everything that is alive on our planet.

Biodiversity is important for its own sake and has its own intrinsic value. A number of studies have shown this value also goes further. Biodiversity is the building block of our 'ecosystems' that in turn provide us with a wide range of goods and services that support our economic and social wellbeing. These include essentials such as food, fresh water and clean air, but also less obvious services such as protection from natural disasters, regulation of our climate, and purification of our water or pollination of our crops. Biodiversity also provides important cultural services, enriching our lives.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The object of this policy is to work towards conserving and enhancing the biodiversity of the Council's area.

The Full Council and any committees of the Council will consider sustainability, environmental impact and biodiversity when making decisions and will develop and implement policies and strategies as required.

In particular, the Council will aim to improve the biodiversity of the area in the following ways:

- consider the potential impact on biodiversity represented by planning applications.
- manage its land and property using environmentally friendly practices that will promote biodiversity.
- support local businesses and council operations in the adoption of low impact / nature positive practices.
- encourage and support other organisations within Blunham to manage their areas of responsibility with biodiversity in mind.
- support residents and local organisation activities to enhance and promote biodiversity.

ACTIONS

Planning applications The Council will:

- when commenting on planning applications, support site and building design that benefits biodiversity through the conservation and integration of existing habitats or provision of new habitats.
- support protection of sensitive habitats from development and will consider whether the development would mean the loss of important habitats for wildlife in respect of all applications.
- consider what each proposed development might make in terms of biodiversity net gain.
- include policies in support of biodiversity within the neighbourhood plan.

Land and property management

- The Parish Council manages three main areas of land in Blunham – the Cemetery on Station Road, The Pound and The Trap. The Parish Council also manages the maintenance of the Churchyard.
- The Parish Council is also responsible for the grass cutting of highway verges and the areas mentioned above. The Parish Council will explore if there are any areas of grass where the first cut could be delayed without impacting of the safety of residents.

The Council will:

- carry out a biodiversity audit of its landholdings.
- consider the conservation and promotion of local biodiversity with regard to the management of its open spaces. This will include adopting beneficial practices with regarding to cutting and removal of vegetation, application of chemicals and timing of maintenance work, paying attention to the Government's regulations for plant protection products.
- take special care in the specification of grounds maintenance contracts to ensure that the work, whilst reaching acceptable standards, does not harm the natural environment.
- source sustainable materials when procuring supplies for the Council's use
- consider biodiversity issues and the implementation of changes when managing its buildings.

Local community

The Council will:

- raise public awareness of biodiversity issues, including through its website and newsletters.
- engage with local businesses and residents regarding biodiversity in the community and how members of the community can assist and make a difference.
- where feasible, involve the community in biodiversity projects on its land including for example tree planting, wildflower meadows, birdbox making.

Partners

The Council will work in partnership with other organisations to protect, promote and enhance biodiversity within the council area.

It will review any local nature recovery strategies, species conservation strategies, or protected site strategies in respect of local Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and consider how it may become more involved in implementing the strategies' recommendations.

MONITORING

This policy was adopted on 30th November 2023 (Minute reference 15:11/23) and will be reviewed in two years or sooner should legislation dictate. A summary of how the policy has been implemented will be published annually, with reference to the original biodiversity audit to show progress.

ACTION PLAN

Site/Objective	Action	Outcome	Target	Reporting/ Publicity
Whole council area	Raise local awareness of biodiversity.	Gain local support for action.	Ongoing	Newsletter,
Protect and support biodiversity	Encourage suitable planting to support biodiversity.	Connect & diversify habitats to meet the needs of a variety of wildlife species	Ongoing	Mapping
Cemetery / church yard	Additional planting Maintain and renew bird boxes as required. Adopt a plan to support wildlife and diversity whilst maintaining the site in a way which enables visitors to experience quiet and calm remembrance. Leave leaf litter and dead vegetation wherever possible as a habitat for invertebrates. In an area of the cemetery away from the memorials, look into establishing a 'bug hotel' or log pile to provide a valuable habitat for mammals and many invertebrates. Ensure that the trees maintenance is undertaken outside of the bird nesting season and to keep the trees healthier and more resistant to pests. Manage the hedgerows to act as ecological corridors particularly for small mammals and birds. Ensure that there are some flowering species to provide additional sources of nectar. Leave an area of the grass in the Churchyard uncut until July to encourage native species to flower and set seed to increase the number of wildflowers and provide nectar for pollinators. Over a number of years this has led to one of the largest areas of	Increased diversity of habitats and food sources Increased cover for invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians and small mammals. Encouraging insects particularly butterflies and bees.	Ongoing	

	Meadow Saxifrage in Bedfordshire.			
Play Area	Sympathetically maintain hedging. Only use environment friendly pesticides where absolutely necessary and only in ideal weather conditions.	Food sources and cover Encourages insects. Sustain and enhance natural habitats.		
Other open spaces	Encourage residents to remove litter and pick up after their dogs. Work with the county council on verge management, favouring biodiversity but noting which areas may need cutting for highway safety. Encourage residents to adopt areas to look after, making it clear make it clear what is expected e.g. peat free compost and no chemicals.	Sustain and enhance natural habitats. Protecting habitats Protecting/enhancing habitats Regular attention.	Ongoing	
The Built Landscape	Ensure that planning consultations are considered against the requirements of the Local Plan (& Neighbourhood Plan) Encourage hedgehog/small animal highways with permeable boundaries	Protecting/enhancing habitats Extending habitats.	Ongoing	
Increase community awareness of biodiversity	Ask residents for their views on what they would like to be done to conserve biodiversity within the parish. Raise awareness of the importance of gardens as habitats for wildlife, with possible actions highlighted in the parish magazine. Create a page on the parish council website for photographs / information / links Encourage local farmers to contribute. Discourage floodlighting.	Engagement/ownership of biodiversity Promote biodiversity. Promote biodiversity. Promote biodiversity. Extending habitats. Protect nocturnal animals.	Ongoing	Neighbourhood plan research and consultation
Support Community Projects	Support hedge/tree planting in any appropriate areas. Work in partnership with the school to develop young	Extending habitats. Promote biodiversity. Promote biodiversity.		

	people's awareness of the environment around them. Consider events and offer volunteering opportunities to support biodiversity, working with local organisations.			
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