![Leicestershire County Council logo] ![Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust logo]

What a Parish Council Can Do for Biodiversity

Parish Councils have statutory duties under the NERC Act 2006 (Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act) but going above and beyond what is required by law can further enhance and protect biodiversity, and also save money and resources. Here are some measures to consider.

Create a Biodiversity or Environmental Policy

- An **Environmental Policy** is a document that encompasses everything that could impact on the environment, including reducing carbon emissions, sustainable use of resources such as paper, fuel, water and power, re-using and recycling, sustainable procurement of resources such as timber, and using sustainably-sourced and native tree or plant species.

  Example: Plumpton Parish Council Environmental Policy

- A **Biodiversity Policy** details how the Council would protect, record, enhance and promote an understanding of biodiversity within the Parish.

  Example: West Bletchley Parish Council Biodiversity Policy

Create a Parish Map

Creating a Parish Map is a good way to involve the community in charting the local features and places that matter to them, including places of cultural, historical and wildlife interest. Features such as meadows, woodlands, hedgerows, ponds and rivers can be included in the Map, which will be a useful current resource and an excellent reference point in the future. See the *Biodiversity Mapping* leaflet in this series and also the Parish Wildlife Map Toolkit, which is an excellent guide to getting started

Carry out an audit or survey of key species and habitats

Further information is given below and in other leaflets in this series, particularly *Biodiversity Mapping*, *Protected Species and Habitats*, and *Wildlife Recording*.

Create a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)

A BAP is a strategy for conserving, protecting and enhancing biological diversity in a local area, and is developed by an organisation in relation to property, land and activities that are under the organisation's control, including those undertaken by agents or contractors working for the Parish Council. Even if the Council chooses not to develop a BAP, undertaking some or all of the processes outlined below can still be very useful.   Consider the following factors when developing a BAP

- **Assess habitats and species present**

  Conduct an overview of the sites for which the Parish Council is responsible and assess the types of habitat and species found there. The assessment could include desk-based research, such as reviewing the site records held by the local environmental records centre, LRERC, and/or commissioning habitat and species surveys for sites identified as being of particular importance for wildlife.

- **Set priorities, objectives and targets**
  The BAP should include priorities, specific objectives and measurable targets. Priorities could include, for example, conserving and enhancing pollinating insects by allowing native wildflowers to flourish on roadside verges and in greenspaces, by reducing the grass-cutting regime. The increase in area covered by wildflowers is a measurable outcome.

- **Achievability**

  The Parish Council's long-term plans should also be considered, for instance, whether future development or change of use of a site will impact on the Council's ability to deliver BAP targets.

- **Implementing the BAP**
  Be specific about what needs to be done, how to achieve targets and in what timescale, and decide who has responsibility for implementing, monitoring and measuring each action.

- **Measuring and Monitoring**
  A baseline against which to measure progress and outcomes is vital, and this should have been achieved via the Parish Council's initial site surveys and/or desk-based assessment. Ongoing monitoring and reviewing of progress is also essential; nature does not stand still, habitats evolve, and therefore BAP objectives and targets will also need to evolve over time.

- **Communication and links to other policies**
  Show how your BAP integrates with the Parish Council's other policies, plans and strategies, and provide links to those documents. Make sure people know about the BAP; add it to your webpage if you have one, and publish an article in your Parish Magazine or similar. These can encourage the community to appreciate their local habitats and get involved with activities. Having a BAP may also put the Parish Council in a favourable position when applying for environmental grants and funding.

See [Oadby and Wigston Borough Council's BAP](#) document as an example of the things to consider and include when developing a BAP, but note that a Parish or Town Council's BAP is likely to be shorter and less complex than that of a larger local authority.

Managing the Parish Council's land for biodiversity

There are various ways in which Parish Councils can create new habitats or enhance existing ones, and this is a good way to engage the local community and encourage them to implement wildlife-friendly measures in their own gardens. Examples are given elsewhere in this series of guidance notes, and of particular relevance are *Trees*, *Verges*, *Hedgerows*, *Ponds and SUDS*, *Pollinators* and *Bats*.

Always check that your project will not damage or destroy an already valuable habitat as its importance may not always obvious. An appropriate survey should highlight any sites or habitats to be either left alone or managed differently.

This is not an exhaustive list, but just a few of the ways in which biodiversity can be enhanced:

- Erect bird boxes, bat boxes and create insect 'hotels'. For further information see the following sites:

  [RSPB guide to bird boxes](#)   [RSPB guide to insect hotels](#)

  [Bat Conservation Trust guide to bat boxes](#)   [Wildlife Trust - guide to bee Hotels](#)

- Plant hedgerows, woodlands and orchards in appropriate locations, using only native species and sustainably-sourced species. See *Protected Species and Habitats* in this series.

- Reduce or abandon the use of pesticides and herbicides, and ensure that these and any other noxious chemicals (including chemical fertilisers) are not used near ponds of water courses.

- Create a wildlife pond. See the leaflet *Ponds and SUDS* in this series.

- Where appropriate and safe to do so, leave standing and fallen dead-wood as a habitat for invertebrates. Dead wood in watercourses also has significant biodiversity value so leave alone unless removal is essential for preventing flooding or it is diverting water-flow.

- Reduce the grass-cutting regime and encourage wildflowers and areas of long grass to thrive.

- If required, manually remove dead leaves or other vegetation debris from pathways, and avoid using leaf-blowers as recent studies have shown a strong link between their use and the decline of insect populations.

- Leaf litter, moss, piles of stones and dead vegetation are all important micro-habitats for invertebrates to feed, breed and shelter.

- Avoid using pesticides, herbicides, slug and snail pellets and chemical fertilisers. A good balance of pests and predators can be naturally encouraged by appropriate habitat management.

Control of invasive and non-native species

Managing land for biodiversity includes removing non-native invasive species that are detrimental to native flora or fauna. There is also a legal duty to control certain invasive species, for instance, Japanese Knotweed. Guidance is available on how to identify and control invasive species, but take care to target the correct species as there may be beneficial native species that look very similar.

Be aware that some recommended control methods may involve the use of noxious chemicals including herbicides, or controlled burning. Extreme care should be taken to protect non-target wildlife species, water courses, people, livestock and pets.

[Invasive alien species: management measures for widely spread species in England and Wales](#)

[How to identify, control and dispose of invasive non-native plants that can harm the environment](#)

Legal and planning frameworks

- Actively discourage developments that do not safeguard or enhance local and important biodiversity. See the *Commenting on Planning Applications* leaflet in this series

- Create [bye-laws](#) and/or declare land as a [Local Nature Reserve](#) (LNR). See the leaflets in this series for further information.

Community engagement

- Inform the local community, whether individuals or local organisations, of the biodiversity value of the local area. One way to achieve this is to have signage explaining the wildlife value of an area and why it's being managed in a particular way.

- Encourage others to consider biodiversity in their activities, for instance, encouraging allotment holders to use wildlife-friendly techniques such as growing vegetables organically and without the use of slug pellets, or asking landowners to encourage wildflowers and areas of long grass.

- Appoint a tree warden and/or a volunteer who could take some responsibility for implementing and monitoring any actions to improve biodiversity, whether they are part of a BAP project or separate scheme.

- Consider asking local residents for their views on what they would like to be done to conserve biodiversity in the area , bearing in mind that not all suggestions will be either achievable or desirable within a given habitat.

- Consider making grants or funds available to local projects that protect and enhance biodiversity

Links with other organisations

Seek support and advice from other organisations such as Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust, RSPB, LROS and Butterfly and Moth conservation organisations. Bear in mind that organisations promoting the conservation of one particular species group may not be able to offer advice on managing a site for wildlife as a whole; managing a site solely for one species group can be detrimental to another ,and upset the ecological balance. Undertake further research and/or contact LRWT for further advice.

Consider involving community groups and volunteering organisations in any practical activities.   Local Environmental volunteering organisations include Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council and TCV.