Biodiversity Mapping

One really positive, and potentially widely engaging activity that a Parish Council can lead is the creation of a biodiversity/wildlife map of the local area.

A Parish Wildlife Map can be an important resource for a variety of reasons and is easy to do.

Why create a wildlife map for the Parish?

There may already be maps of your local area, but these may quite old and out of date: for instance, local landscapes can change quickly as developments occur and landowners change their needs. What's more, habitats themselves can change, through a natural process called 'succession', and important species can appear or disappear, perhaps as a result of climate change.

It is important to have up-to-date information on your area in order to be able to make the most appropriate decisions, for example when considering a planning application or deciding upon management of land or buildings for wildlife.

What do you need to do?

- Create a team and delegate the tasks.
- Neighbourhood Plan groups can be a source of volunteers to help collect the data. Data on the [Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records Centre](#) website is free to Neighbourhood Plan Groups.
- Find out what is already known about your local area.
- Identify what else it would be useful to know.
- Create or collate any necessary survey resources that you will need.
- Undertake the survey and mapping.
- Compile and publish the map.

There are a number of resources to help you, and the [Parish Wildlife Map Toolkit](#) is a good one.

What is already known about your local area?

You can begin by finding out what is already known about the wildlife of your local Parish. Data on the [Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records Centre](#) website is free to those who have established a Neighbourhood Plan Group.

It would also be worth knowing the 'local character' description for your area: [National Character Area profile reports](#)

Aerial and satellite photographs (for example, from [Google Earth](#)) can give you an overview of the whole area, and this may be a good place to start since you can then use this to later identify areas for where there does not appear to be any information. Look for the areas that look more natural or untidy, as these are more likely to be good for wildlife.

You can also use Ordnance Survey maps, which have been produced at various scales and across a range of dates (which can be useful). Maps produced more than 50 years ago are copyright free.

The UK Government has also enabled something called the [Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside](#) (MAGIC). This can be used to help find out important information such as what if any legally protected sites might lie in your area. The [Leicestershire and Rutland Environment Records Centre (LRERC)](#) can also provide important information.

The sort of information that would be helpful is to know the type of habitat and also any interesting, characteristic or legally protected species.

These are usually the most valuable habitats for wildlife:

- Unimproved pasture (unfertilised grassland used for grazing)
- Rough grassland and scrub
- Meadows
- Wetlands e.g. fens, marshes and reed-beds
- Woodlands (deciduous and ancient woodland)
- Hedgerows and scrub
- Native trees (especially old trees)
- Rivers, streams and ditches
- Lakes and ponds
- Older buildings
- Allotments
- Churchyards
- Disused quarries and derelict land
- Railway embankments and disused railway lines
- Old roads and green lanes, and wide roadside verges
- Old orchards

These are usually less valuable:

- Arable fields (growing crops)
- Short mown grass (on verges or town/village greens, and amenity areas)
- Plantation woodland (especially conifers)
- Newer buildings and the areas around them

Identify what else it would be useful to know

Given the previous list of valuable and not so valuable habitats, how many of them (that appear on the maps and aerial/satellite images) do you actually have information for?

Create or collate any necessary survey resources that you will need

There are lots of different sources of useful materials for carrying out wildlife surveys and many of these have been listed elsewhere in the guidance leaflet on ***wildlife recording***.

Undertake the survey and mapping

Many habitats are on private-land, so you should, of course, obtain permission from the landowner before carrying out a survey there. However, some land is accessible via the Public Rights of Way and if there is a 'live' planning application you can request the attendance of the site by a publicly funded ecologist to assess what is on site (County or District).

If you need help with identifying species, then you can use resources such as iSpot or NatureSpot

iSpot is a citizen science project run by The Open University (OU) that was developed to help anyone learn about and engage with nature while sharing and building their wildlife identification skills. NatureSpot is a website dedicated to the recording of wildlife in Leicestershire & Rutland). Data for this is accessible through the site and the LRERC.

What else can you do with the map?

- Identify the threats to the local biodiversity and whether you can influence them,
- Set out a vision for the biodiversity of the Parish,
- Set aims for conservation of the Parish biodiversity.
- Set actions to achieve the aims.
- Set timescales and agree responsibilities.