



Ogwell Parish Council's Biodiversity Duty

Introduction - Statutory Duty

Under the 2021 Environment Act, public authorities (including town and parish councils) who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England.

Government guidance published on 17th 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 may 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 in respect of biodiversity is already taking place locally.
- Agree what further steps to take at this stage.

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.
- Gathering expert advice on possible actions in support of biodiversity.
- 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.

Ogwell Parish Council Biodiversity Policy

Preamble

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, Ogwell Parish Council will in exercising all its functions have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.

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. It is the building block of our 'ecosystems'. These 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 enhancing and protecting the biodiversity of Ogwell. Ogwell Parish Council will consider sustainability, environmental impact and biodiversity when making decisions and will develop and implement policies and strategies as required.

In particular, Ogwell Parish 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. This will include using peat free materials and avoiding the use of pesticides.
- Support activities undertaken by residents and local organisations to enhance and promote biodiversity.
- Network with residents, other local Parish Councils and environmental organisations to maximise benefits where possible.

Actions

Planning applications

- The council, when commenting on planning applications, will support site and building design that benefits biodiversity through the conservation and integration of existing habitats or provision of new habitats.
- It will 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.
- It will consider what each proposed development might make in terms of biodiversity net gain.
- It will include policies in support of biodiversity within the neighbourhood plan.

Land and property management

- The council will carry out a biodiversity audit of its landholdings.
- The council will consider the conservation and promotion of local biodiversity with regard to the management of its open spaces. This will include adopting beneficial practices with regard to cutting and removal of vegetation, application of chemicals and timing of maintenance work.
- Special care will be taken in the specification of grounds maintenance contracts to ensure that the work, whilst reaching acceptable standards, does not harm the natural environment.
- The council will consider biodiversity issues and the implementation of changes when managing its buildings.
- Where the Parish Council does not have direct responsibility for an area e.g. the upkeep of the cemetery or private gardens, it will encourage and support the goals in the action plan.

Local community

- The council will raise public awareness of biodiversity issues, including through its website and the parish magazine.
- The council will engage with local businesses and residents regarding biodiversity in the community and how members of the community can assist and make a difference.
- It will, 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 Ogwild and other organisations to protect, promote and enhance biodiversity within areas of the parish.

This policy will be reviewed each year at the Annual Meeting, together with a summary of how the policy has been implemented in the previous 12 months.

Biodiversity Action Plan

Site / Objective	Action	Outcome	Target (yrs)	Reporting / publicity
Whole council area	Raise local awareness of biodiversity	Gain local support for action	Ongoing	OPC website, parish magazine, social media
Protect and support biodiversity	Encourage suitable planting to support biodiversity. Mapping of land in Parish owned or managed by Council. Develop the Parish Biodiversity Database making it accessible to the public.	Connect & diversify habitats to protect existing flora and fauna and support increased biodiversity.	Ongoing	Develop the Parish Biodiversity Database making it accessible to the public.
Churchyard	Encourage and support: Additional planting. The adoption of a plan to support wildlife & biodiversity while maintaining the site in a way that enables quiet remembrance by visitors.	Increased diversity of habitats and food sources. Increased cover for wildlife; encouraging insects, particularly pollinators.		
Play areas	Sympathetically maintain hedging. Leave some areas unmown. Avoid use of pesticides & only use environmentally friendly ones where absolutely necessary.	Food sources & cover. Encourages insects. Sustain & enhance natural habitats.		
Village green / other open spaces	Adopt a management plan. Encourage residents to remove litter & pick up dog mess. Work with district / county council on verge management. Encourage residents to adopt areas to look after.	Sustain & enhance natural habitats. Protecting habitats. Protecting / enhancing habitats. Regular attention.		
Built landscape	Ensure planning consultations are considered against the requirements of the 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 locally. Raise awareness of the importance of gardens as wildlife habitats, with possible actions highlighted in the parish magazine. Create a page on the council	Engagement / ownership of biodiversity. Promote biodiversity.	Ongoing	

	<p>website for photos / information / links. Encourage local farmers, schools and businesses to contribute.</p> <p>Provide seeds / bulbs etc for residents' use.</p> <p>Discourage floodlighting.</p>	<p>Promote biodiversity.</p> <p>Promote biodiversity.</p> <p>Extending habitats.</p> <p>Protect nocturnal animals.</p>		
Support community projects	<p>Support hedge / tree planting in any appropriate areas.</p> <p>Work in partnership with the school to develop young people's awareness of the environment around them.</p> <p>Consider events and offer volunteering opportunities to support biodiversity, working with local organisations.</p>	<p>Extending habitats.</p> <p>Promote biodiversity.</p> <p>Promote biodiversity.</p>		