

BIODIVERSITY DUTY

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.

Town and parish councils, unlike other authorities, are not obliged to publish a report on their actions, but the Government guidance required all public authorities to complete their first consideration of what action to take for biodiversity by 1 January 2024 (though this is not being policed for town and parish councils). They were required to agree their policies and objectives as soon as possible after this and must then 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 (if not already, as soon as possible).
- 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, e.g. potential for jointly-supported wildlife corridors.
- making contact with local voluntary groups working on nature conservation.

- carrying out a biodiversity audit of council landholdings and/or the whole council area, potentially involving residents in a "BioBlitz"
- gathering expert advice on possible actions in support of biodiversity, such as from Caring for God's Acre and the Eco Church initiative in respect of churchyards
- 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.

BURFORD PARISH COUNCIL BIODIVERSITY POLICY

INTRODUCTION

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, Burford 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 within land owned by Burford Parish Council.

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

In particular, Burford Parish Council will aim to improve the biodiversity of the area in the following ways;

- consider the potential impact on biodiversity represented by relevant planning applications.
- manage its land and property using environmentally friendly practices that will promote biodiversity.
- support local businesses & council operations in the adoption of low impact practices.
- support residents and local organisation activities to enhance and promote biodiversity.

ACTIONS

Planning applications

The council will:

- when commenting on relevant 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 ask the planning authority to consider whether the development would mean the loss of important habitats for wildlife in respect of all applications.
- proactively follow up and seek the help of Shropshire County Council Planning department to enforce mandated biodiversity planning conditions and S106's that it feels are not being adequately implemented and maintained by developers.

Land and property management

The council will:

- carry out a biodiversity audit of its landholdings, subject to funding being available.
- encourage 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.
- 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.
- consider biodiversity issues and the implementation of changes when managing its buildings.

Local community

Subject to resources being available, the council will:

- raise public awareness of biodiversity issues, including through its website and other media.
- 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, bird box making.

Partners

Burford Parish Council will work in partnership with other organisations to protect, promote and enhance biodiversity within Burford Parish.

Subject to resources being available, 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.

This policy will be reviewed each year together with a summary of how the policy has been implemented in the previous twelve months.

Adopted by Full Council - 10 July 2025

Review: July 2026