

Chagford Parish Council Biodiversity Policy

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.

Town and parish councils, unlike other authorities, are not obliged to publish a report on their actions, but the Government guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complying-with-the-biodiversity-duty>) 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 must reconsider the selected actions within five years of completing their previous consideration, or more frequently if they choose.

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, Chagford Parish Council will consider what action to take, consistent with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective.

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 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 the parish to manage their areas of responsibility with biodiversity in mind. These groups include Teign River Restoration Project, Chagford Conservation Group, Plastic Free Chagford, Proper Job, Commoners, Young Farmers, Regenerative Agriculture Group, Chagford CofE Primary School.
- produce a list of other Devon-wide and National organisations likely to help with this, such as Moor Meadows, Caring for God's Acre, Plantlife, Devon Wildlife Trust, The Local Nature Partnership - <https://www.devonlnp.org.uk/>, and the RSPB
- support residents and local organisation activities to enhance and promote biodiversity.

ACTIONS

Planning applications

The Council will aim to

- 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 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 any proposed neighbourhood plan.

Land and property management

The Council will aim to

- 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 regard to cutting and removal of vegetation, avoidance of application of chemical herbicides or insecticides where possible, 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.
- produce an online map of the parish showing all the areas directly owned by the Parish - areas such as Padley, Open Fields, etc where council has some involvement and the wider area where significant change and influence could be brought to bear.
- look at the management plans for Padley Common.

Local community

The Council will aim to

- 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.
 - work with interested groups in the community to protect, promote and enhance biodiversity within the council area.
 - 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.
- produce a list of all potential organisations and groups which could help with the changes, management, and publicity to help increase bio-diversity.

MONITORING

This policy was adopted on December 13th 2023 (Minute reference 93d) and will be reviewed in two years or sooner should legislation dictate / each year at the Annual Meeting. A summary of how the policy has been implemented will be published annually, with reference to the original biodiversity audit to show progress.