

WALTON-IN-GORDANO PARISH COUNCIL

In the North Somerset Council Ward of Gordano Valley

Parish Council Biodiversity Policy

Developed in July 2023 and adopted by the Parish Council at its September 2023 meeting

This policy will, like all The Council's Governance Documents, be reviewed annually during February/March

Introduction

The World Wildlife Fund defines Biodiversity as all the different kinds of life you'll find in one area - the variety of animals, plants, fungi, and even microorganisms like bacteria that make up our natural world. Each of these species and organisms work together in ecosystems, like an intricate web, to maintain balance and support life. Biodiversity supports everything in nature that we need to survive: food, clean water, medicine, and shelter. But as humans put increasing pressure on the planet, using and consuming more resources than ever before, we risk upsetting the balance of ecosystems and losing biodiversity.

The Environmental Improvement Plan was published in 2018 as a 25 year vision setting out government strategies for improving the natural environment. January 2023 saw the plan's first five-yearly update laying a biodiversity duty on Parish Councils (PCs) (visit https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1168372/environmental-improvement-plan-2023.pdf to view). PCs must understand what the biodiversity duty is and consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity by agreeing appropriate policies they can deliver in an action plan. That plan must be reviewed within 5 years of its inception or previous revision, or more often if appropriate (as a Governance Document ours will be reviewed annually). There are three strategies that *must* be considered as part of a PCs need to comply with its biodiversity duty:

Local nature recovery strategies (about 50): Each one will agree priorities for nature's recovery, map existing areas for nature and proposals for creating/improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals. As strategies are published, a PC will link to the one most local to it.

Species Conservation Strategies safeguard the future of at-risk species, finding best ways to comply with existing obligations to protect species and to improve their conservation status.

Protected site strategies involve protecting and restoring species and habitats in protected sites and provide ways to overcome off-site pressures, like nutrient pollution, in the wider catchment.

This biodiversity duty lies principally with parishes that own and run land and buildings: it requires them to foster opportunities for biodiversity issues to be addressed such that there is significant improvement both in existing environments and in new ones that are created by re-organisation or via planning permissions.

As our Parish neither has, nor manages land or buildings, we cannot be an initiator of biodiversity strategies. However, we will be expected, if appropriate, to influence what is called 'biodiversity net-gain' by encouraging others, such as the Village Hall, the Church and domestic gardeners, nature conservancy organisations and farmers operating in our area.

Some 50 'Local Recovery Strategies' (LRS) are being established during 2023, of which one will cover this parish's area. When this happens we will be able to root our biodiversity strategy to our LRS. So, over the next year or so, we will be learning our way towards appropriate involvement in this work. In the meantime, the list below provides details of where the Parish Council might become involved as appropriate. As experience points us towards opportunities, so the list can grow.

Specific Areas Where the Parish Council Can Influence its Biodiversity Duty

Planning: The Parish 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. The Parish Council 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.

Public Awareness: The Parish Council will, wherever possible, raise public awareness of biodiversity issues. It will, where possible, communicate information and raise awareness of biodiversity through its website and newsletters.

Residents: The Parish Council will, where possible, encourage residents to enhance their biodiversity contribution by providing such things as nest boxes and bird feeders, holes in fences for hedgehogs and amphibians to pass, planting for butterflies and bees, wildlife ponds, corners of the garden and areas of grassland and wild flowers left to nature, etc.

Specialist Groups: Areas such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Nature Reserves and those under Avon Wildlife Trust Management may be protected by other legislation, but the Parish Council, where appropriate and welcomed, might find constructive ways of being involved in actions needed to improve site conditions.