



Biodiversity Policy

1. Purpose

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, Witney Town 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.

1.1 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.

2. Scope

2.1 Aims & Objectives

The object of this policy is to work towards enhancing and protecting the biodiversity of Witney Lake and Country Park and Green Spaces.

All committees of Witney Town Council will consider sustainability, environmental impact and biodiversity when making decisions and will develop and implement policies and strategies as required.

In particular, Witney Town Council will aim to improve the biodiversity of the area in the following ways:

2.1.2 Employ a Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer to lead on biodiversity enhancements across its Estate (in post since 2022).

- 2.1.3 Consider the potential impact on biodiversity represented by planning applications.
- 2.1.4 Manage its land and property using environmentally friendly practices that will promote biodiversity.
- 2.1.5 Support local businesses & council operations in the adoption of low impact practices.
- 2.1.6 Support residents and local organisation activities to enhance and promote biodiversity.

3. Actions

3.1 Planning Applications

- 3.1.1 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.
- 3.1.2 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.
- 3.1.3 It will consider what each proposed development might make in terms of biodiversity net gain.

3.2 Land & Property Management

- 3.2.1 The council will carry out a biodiversity audit of its landholdings.
- 3.2.2 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 regarding to cutting and removal of vegetation, application of chemicals and timing of maintenance work.
- 3.2.3 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.
- 3.2.4 The council will consider biodiversity issues and the implementation of changes when managing its buildings.

3.3 Local Community

- 3.3.1 The council will raise public awareness of biodiversity issues, including through its website and newsletters.
- 3.3.2 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.
- 3.3.3 It will, where feasible, involve the community in biodiversity projects on its land including for example tree planting, wildflower meadows, birdbox making.

3.4 Partners

- 3.4.1 Witney Town Council will work in partnership with other organisations to protect, promote and enhance biodiversity within areas of the town.
- 3.4.2 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.

An Action Plan on implementation of the above is included as Appendix 1.

4. Review of Policy

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 twelve months.

Adopted by:	Policy, Governance & Finance Committee
Date:	25 November 2024
Minute Number:	F652
Next Review Date:	May 2025

APPENDIX 1 – ACTION PLAN

SITE / OBJECTIVE	ACTION	OUTCOME	TARGET (Years)	REPORTING / PUBLICITY
Whole council area	Raise local awareness of biodiversity.	Gain local support for action.	Ongoing	Newsletter
Protect and support biodiversity	Encourage suitable planting to support biodiversity.	Connect & diversify habitats to meet the needs of a variety of wildlife species	Ongoing	Mapping
Cemetery / churchyard	Additional planting	Increased diversity of habitats and food sources	Ongoing	Newsletters, social media, Town notice boards Surveys and habitat creation
	Maintain and renew bird, bat and Owl boxes as required.	Increased cover for invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians and small mammals.	Ongoing	
	Adopt a plan to support wildlife & diversity whilst maintaining the site in a way which enables visitors to experience quiet and calm remembrance.	Encouraging insects particularly butterflies & bees.	Ongoing	Surveys and habitat creation
Recreation ground	Sympathetically maintain hedging.	Food sources & cover	Ongoing	As per management plan If appropriate Only trained staff to carry out
	Leave some areas unmown.	Encourages insects.	Ongoing	
	Only use environment friendly pesticides where absolutely necessary and only in ideal weather conditions.	Sustain & enhance natural habitats.	As per council policy	
Common / other open spaces	Adopt a management plan.	Sustain & enhance natural habitats.	Done	Ongoing
	Encourage residents to remove litter and pick up after their dogs.	Protecting habitats	Ongoing	Regular programmes and equipment for public use
	Work with the county & district council on verge management	Protecting/enhancing habitats	Ongoing	After assessment
	Encourage residents to adopt areas to look after.	Regular attention.	Where appropriate	
SITE / OBJECTIVE	ACTION	OUTCOME	TARGET (Years)	REPORTING / PUBLICITY
The Built Landscape	Ensure that planning consultations are considered	Protecting/enhancing habitats	Ongoing	Council policy

	<p>against the requirements of the Local Plan</p> <p>Encourage hedgehog/small animal highways with permeable boundaries</p>	Extending habitats.	Within next 5 years	Newsletters, social media, Town notice boards
Increase community awareness of biodiversity	<p>Ask residents for their views on what they would like to be done to conserve biodiversity within the parish.</p> <p>Raise awareness of the importance of gardens as habitats for wildlife, with possible actions highlighted in the parish magazine.</p> <p>Create a page on the parish council website for photographs / information / links</p> <p>Provide seed bombs / bulbs etc. for residents' use.</p> <p>Discourage floodlighting.</p>	<p>Engagement/ownership of biodiversity</p> <p>Promote biodiversity.</p> <p>Promote biodiversity.</p> <p>Extending habitats.</p> <p>Protect nocturnal animals.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Over next 3 years</p> <p>Council policy</p>	<p>Newsletters, social media, Town notice boards</p> <p>Regular programmes and events</p> <p>Already doing this</p> <p>Annual programs to develop this idea Constant review</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>	<p>Ongoing process</p> <p>Annual review and promotions through comms team</p> <p>Ongoing Volunteer programme</p>	<p>As per Management Plan</p> <p>Comms team have a number of events/promotions</p>