

WITHYHAM PARISH COUNCIL

BIODIVERSITY POLICY

Responsibility Climate and Ecology Advisory Group / Full Council

Review Cycle: 2 years, or earlier in the event of legislative changes

Date of Adoption/Renewal	Date for review
October 2024	October 2026

Background

Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 there is a duty on public authorities in England, including Parish Councils that manage land, to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of their policy or decision making. This was further strengthened by the Environment Act 2021 section 102, so public authorities must now consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England.

This duty also means that town and parish councils can spend funds in conserving biodiversity.

This means a public authority must:

- Consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on their consideration.
- Act to deliver policies and achieve objectives.

The Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) UK biodiversity 2020 Strategy¹ states that 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 human survival depends upon it”.

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.

Scope

This Policy applies to the entirety of the Parish of Withyham (defined as the Local area), which includes all assets (land and built environment) managed by the Parish Council.

This Policy also applies to all Withyham Parish Councillors, Parish Council employees, and Parish Council sub-contractors.

Our ambition

- To enhance and protect biodiversity within the Parish.
- To make biodiversity an integral part of all decision making.
- To involve and enable the community to connect with nature.

Aims and Objectives

The object of this policy is to work towards conserving and enhancing the biodiversity of the Council's area. The Full 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 groups, businesses and council operations in the adoption of low impact / nature positive practices through actions like information sharing, WPC's grants scheme and creating partnership projects.
- Encourage and support other organisations within the parish / town to manage their areas of responsibility with biodiversity in mind.
- Support residents and local organisation activities to enhance and promote biodiversity.

WPC Biodiversity Actions

1. Planning applications

Withyham Parish Council Planning Committee is a statutory consultee on planning applications made to Wealden District Council (The Planning Authority)

- Withyham Parish Council's Planning Committee will give weight to site and building design that benefits biodiversity through the conservation and integration of existing habitats or provision of new habitats, for example swift or bee bricks, promoting creation and maintenance of habitats at the site such as new trees, hedgerows, ponds or meadows, and promoting sustainable energy features.
- Withyham Parish Council's Planning Committee will give weight to the protection of sensitive habitats including consideration to whether an application would mean the loss of important habitats for wildlife.
- Withyham Parish Council's Planning Committee recognises the need for biodiversity net gain.
- Withyham Parish Council's Planning Committee understands the importance of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Areas of

Conservation, designated under the EU Habitats Directive (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA) situated in its parish, and will give weight to these.

- When considering consultations Withyham Parish Council Planning Committee will where appropriate include consideration for biodiversity.
- Should Withyham Parish Council consider a neighbourhood plan this would include considerations for biodiversity.

2. Land and property management

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, paying attention to the Government's regulations for plant protection products.
- Implement a biodiversity audit of its landholdings, with community involvement and / or an ecology specialist.
- Seek to understand the impact of the Biodiversity Policy implementation in the local area through regular surveying of its land to monitor for biodiversity progress, though formal and / or informal means
- 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 wherever possible when procuring supplies for the Council's use.
- Consider biodiversity issues and the implementation of changes when managing its buildings.
- Manage its land using environmentally friendly practices that promote biodiversity, with regular reviews undertaken of best practices to monitor for improvement. Examples include ensuring trees or hedges are cut outside of bird nesting season, leaving leaf litter and dead wood as habitats, and reducing grass mowing where possible.
- Cease the use of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilisers (except for exceptional circumstances).
- Encourage Wealden District Council (WDC) and East Sussex County Council (ESCC) to exercise their responsibilities as per their own biodiversity policies.
- Seek opportunities and / or apply for funding to create projects to support and enhance biodiversity when practicable within the scope of the Council and its staff.

Examples of Potential Opportunities

There are many potential opportunities to support biodiversity within the parish, particularly through partnerships with local parish groups, which can include things like:

- swift boxes
- publicly accessible examples of planting for wildlife
- community herb gardens

There is also the potential to explore what is possible on Withyham Parish Council owned land at:

- Groombridge Recreation Ground
- Teasley Mead (Blackham)
- Balls Green (Withyham)
- The Reading Room, St John's (Crowborough)

3. Local community

The Council will:

- Communicate information to raise public awareness of biodiversity issues and opportunities, including through its website and newsletters.
- Engage with and support residents, local organisations and landowners where possible in activities and / or initiatives to enhance and promote biodiversity.
- Where practicable, involve the community in biodiversity projects on its land such as for tree planting and birdbox making.
- Collaborate with local groups to create and support initiatives and actions that centre, support and enhance biodiversity.
- Encourage residents to participate in local / national surveys which monitor for biodiversity, for example the use of tools for measuring local biodiversity such as the iNaturalist app.
- Include a page on the WPC website with local projects / areas which are important for and can be enhanced to support local biodiversity.

4. Partners

The Council will:

- Work in partnership with other organisations to protect, promote and enhance biodiversity within the council area. This includes, but is not limited to, the East Sussex / West Sussex Partnership Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), and working with Wealden District Council's climate team on matters relating to biodiversity and nature recovery.
- Partner with organisations wherever possible to create impacts for wildlife, especially those creating nature and green assets with impacts greater than the sum of their parts, such as helping to establish wildlife corridors.
- Consider 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.
- When working with partner organisations to communicate the importance of biodiversity.

5. Protected sites

- The Parish Council commits to wherever possible supporting organisations who preserve, enhance, and restore biodiversity including protected designation areas such as the Ashdown Forest AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

6. Biodiversity Action Plan

- The Climate and Ecology Advisory Group to create a Biodiversity Action Plan for Withyham Parish Council.
- The Biodiversity Action Plan to be reviewed annually, and updates given to Full Council on actions taken when appropriate.

Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed every two years, or sooner should legislation dictate.