

Ash Parish Council

BIODIVERSITY POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Ash Parish Council has an important leadership role to play in creating a sustainable environment where biodiversity can thrive. It understands that biodiversity is a crucial component of the quality of life for the community it serves and is aware of its responsibility to conserve and enhance biodiversity and recognises it as an integral part of policy and decision making. It recognises existing and future responsibilities both to conserve and promote biodiversity and to take positive action through innovation in the management of open spaces and verges, as well as conservation of our natural areas.

ABOUT BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity is the collective term for the variety and abundance of forms of life found in an area, including animals, plants, fungi and microorganisms like bacteria. Each of these species and organisms work together in ecosystems to maintain, balance and support life.

It is well documented¹ that there has been a dramatic decline of species and habitats in recent decades. Restoring nature is critical to reversing the loss of biodiversity. Ecosystems don't need to be lost forever, it is possible to restore them by planting (and caring for) trees, shrubs and wildflower meadows. It is important that local communities take the lead in conservation projects, with benefits for people as well as nature.

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006² states that: "Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity". This is known as the "Biodiversity Duty".

Section 41 of the NERC Act, requires government to publish a list of habitats and species which are of principle importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. This list is used to guide public bodies in implementing the "Biodiversity Duty" when carrying out their normal functions.

The Environment Act 2021³ further stipulates:

- That planning permission for development will only be granted where there is a "Biodiversity Net Gain";
- A strengthened legal duty for public bodies to conserve **and enhance** biodiversity;
- A new biodiversity reporting requirements for local authorities; and
- Mandatory spatial strategies for nature known as "Local Nature Recovery Strategies".

These are all requirements that apply to the Parish Council.

OBJECTIVES

- Protect and support the biodiversity of the land that Ash Parish Council owns or manages.
- Use Parish Council influence to support and enhance biodiversity in the Parish as a whole.
- Increase community awareness of, and involvement in, biodiversity issues.
- Support local biodiversity projects.

WHAT THE COUNCIL WILL DO TO PROMOTE BIODIVERSITY

- The PC will promote the collection and collation of information on biodiversity in the Parish.
- The PC will ensure the production and development of an ongoing “Biodiversity Action Plan” in conjunction with the local community.
- The PC will have due regard to “Nature Recovery Strategies” developed at County level.
- The PC will identify local sites for inclusion in “Nature Recovery Networks” at County level.
- The PC will declare “Local Nature Reserves” on sites that fit the accepted criteria.
- The PC will promote the biodiversity of the land it manages. 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.
- The PC will work in partnership with other organisations to protect, promote and enhance biodiversity within areas of the parish.

The PC will, through its website and newsletters, raise public awareness of biodiversity issues and encourage involvement in conservation work as part of its leadership role within the local community.

- The PC will involve the community in promoting biodiversity and living areas on its land including, for example, tree planting, developing living areas and wilding areas.
- The PC will ensure that Biodiversity Net Gain is taken into account when commenting on planning applications.

Notes

BNG is to become a mandatory requirement of the planning system and is set to come into effect from November 2023. Planning permission for new projects above a certain size will be required to secure a 10% improvement in biodiversity, with 30-year management and monitoring.

A Biodiversity Action Plan is a public statement by the body of its biodiversity objectives and the methods by which it intends to achieve them.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature’s recovery and provide wider environmental benefits.

The Nature Recovery Network (NRN) is a network of wildlife-rich places. The aim is to expand, improve and connect wild places across the countryside to allow nature space to thrive.

Local Nature Reserves are declared by local authorities (Ash PC would ask SSDC or Somerset Council to declare). They’re usually areas of natural green space with public access, but other types of site can be declared as long as they have wildlife or geological interest.

1. <https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/projects/biodiversity/biodiversity-in-the-uk/>
2. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents>
3. [World-leading Environment Act becomes law - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/world-leading-environment-act-becomes-law)