



Biodiversity Policy

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INTRODUCTION - STATUTORY DUTY

This policy sets out how Great Chart with Singleton Parish Council will meet its statutory biodiversity duty, embed biodiversity considerations into decision-making, and deliver practical improvements in the parish.

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.

Other relevant legislations to note:

- **Environment Act 2021 – Section 102** (amends the NERC Act duty)
- **NERC Act 2006 – Section 40(1)** (the duty itself)
- **Environment Act requirement to reconsider actions at least every 5 years**
- **2023 Biodiversity Duty Guidance** Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) – rolled out nationally under Environment Act 2021
- **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)** regulations (mandatory for major developments since Feb 2024; minor since April 2024)

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](#) required all public authorities to complete their first consideration of what action to take for biodiversity by 1 January 2024 (though this is not being policed for town and parish councils). They were required to agree to their policies and objectives as soon as possible after this and must then reconsider the selected actions within five years of completing their previous consideration, or more frequently if they choose.

To comply with the guidance, town and parish councils could as a minimum:

- have biodiversity as an agenda item for a meeting (if not already, as soon as possible).
- note what action they are already taking to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- agree what further steps they should take to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

Such steps may include:

- reviewing what biodiversity or nature recovery plans are already in place from other local authorities, e.g. potential for jointly-supported wildlife corridors.
- making contact with local voluntary groups working on nature conservation.
- carrying out a biodiversity audit of council landholdings and/or the whole council area, potentially involving residents in a “BioBlitz”
- gathering expert advice on possible actions in support of biodiversity, such as from Caring for God's Acre and the Eco Church initiative in respect of churchyards
- drafting an action plan that covers action that the council will take itself as well as support for the actions of other local bodies.

Whatever action is agreed, as a minimum local councils could ensure they address biodiversity concerns when commenting on planning applications.

All these steps may inform an agreed biodiversity policy for which a model example is attached, with acknowledgement to Stondon Parish Council. Guidance for town and parish councils on developing a [local nature action plan](#) has been published by South Gloucestershire Council, as well as a [field guide](#) for those with little or no ecological background.

BACKGROUND

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, **Great Chart with Singleton Parish Council** (hereinafter referred to as the Council) which has any functions exercisable in relation to England must from time to time consider what action the authority can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective.

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

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.

Further notable definitions:

- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)**
- Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)**
- Habitats of Principal Importance (Section 41 species/habitats)**

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 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 businesses and council operations in the adoption of low impact / nature positive practices.

- 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.

ACTIONS

Planning applications

The council will expect planning applications to demonstrate meaningful Biodiversity Net Gain. The council will raise concerns where proposals fail to meet required net gain standards or where biodiversity are outweighed by other adverse impacts.

- 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 will 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.

Land and property management

The Council will:

- 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 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.
- 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.
- *Adopt a "no-mow May" or seasonal mowing regime for specific sites where appropriate.*
- *Avoid peat-based products when procuring plants or compost.*
- *Ensure any tree planting uses UK-sourced, disease-free stock.*

Local community

The Council will:

- 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.

Roles and Responsibilities

Full Council – adopts policy and sets strategic direction

Clerk & Officers – implement and monitor actions

Working Groups / Committees – oversee specific projects

Contractors – must comply with biodiversity-friendly specifications

Partners

The Council will work in partnership with other organisations to protect, promote and enhance biodiversity within the council area. Including but not limited to:

- Kent Wildlife Trust
- Ashford Borough Council environmental policies
- Aspire
- Local schools / community groups
- Local Nature Recovery Strategy partner

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.

Monitoring and Reporting

This policy will be reviewed in two years or sooner should legislation dictate. A summary of how the policy has been implemented will be published annually, with reference to the original biodiversity audit to show progress.

The council will Commit to **publishing a short annual biodiversity statement** on the website.

Establish **KPIs**, e.g.:

- number of biodiversity projects delivered
- area of land managed for biodiversity
- number of volunteers engaged
- progress against biodiversity audit recommendations