

Notes of **BIODIVERSITY WORKING GROUP** held on **TUESDAY 20th MAY 2026** at 10:30 at Newton's Place.

In attendance: Steve Garlick (SG) - Chairperson (presiding)
Cllr Gwen Jennings (GJ) – Vice Chairperson

Dr Peter Beale (PB)
Jane Camp (JC)
Anita Gorst (AG)
Cllr Mike Joyce (MJ)
Cllr Colin Parker (CP)
John Pike (JP)
Betina Winkler (BW)
Thomas Collard (TC) – NATC Green Spaces Officer
Linda McGuirk (LM) – NATC Principal Administrator

1. CHAIRPERSON & VICE CHAIRPERSON

Nominations were invited for the position of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson of the Biodiversity Working Group; accordingly, it was:

AGREED that Steve Garlick be elected Chairperson of the Biodiversity Working Group and that Councillor Gwen Jennings be appointed Vice Chairperson of the Biodiversity Working Group.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received on behalf of Cllr Laura Wood, Andrew Rothery and Linda Robson-Burrell.

3. NOTES

Discussion took place regarding the frequency of meetings. Thomas advised that the working group had not met since 18th March 2025 as there had been no major updates or matters requiring discussion.

4. BIODIVERSITY POLICY

a) Update on and Review progress of 2025 actions:

The Working Group received an update on progress made against the 2025 Biodiversity Action Plan.

- Planning: The Green Spaces Officer provides comments to the Planning Committee and is undertaking an arboriculture qualification.

- The Built Landscape: Bee hotels have been installed in Victoria Gardens. Swift boxes and callers have been installed at St Leonards Clock Tower. Ongoing discussions continue regarding the Sponsor a Roundabout initiative.

- **Printing:** The Council now limits the printing and posting of agendas unless specifically requested by Councillors.
- **Wildflower Planting:** Verge preparation and sowing commenced in April 2026 following expert advice and two rounds of community engagement.
- **Water Conservation:** A water harvesting station was installed at Decoy allotments in late 2025. Consideration is also being given to installing a rainwater collection facility at Vicary's Allotments.
- **Local Community:** Allotments have been registered on iNaturalist. The Green Spaces Officer has introduced the project to the Newton Abbot and District Co-operative Allotment Association (NADCAA) in March 2025 and will offer workshops and lessons to members.
- **Communications:** A biodiversity page has been created on the Council's website and is updated periodically. A biodiversity display was launched in March 2026.
- **Community Engagement:** Two rounds of community engagement on wildflower verges were undertaken in May 2025 and January 2026.
- **Culture:** The Sustainable Procurement Policy was introduced in September 2025.
- **Partners:** The Council supported Green Futures pesticide collection initiative in October 2025 and again in 2026.

Linda McGuirk and Thomas Collard attended the Pesticide Free Devon Conference where they facilitated a workshop on the role of local government.

The Working Group reviewed images of the new verges, wildflower beds, signage and "No Parking" signs that have been installed. Google Maps was also used to demonstrate the locations of the planting areas. Members suggested that the Town Council undertakes resident feedback on the scheme. It was noted that the wildflower seeds had been sourced locally from Goren Farms and that Dr Beale is collecting local seeds.

Discussion also took place regarding the potential distribution of seeds through Linda's Seed Library and the possible use of green hay as an alternative planting method.

Members discussed the possibility of introducing a Newton Abbot Green Trail and agreed that further investigation should be undertaken.

b) Members were asked to consider new/additional actions:

- i. Introduce a requirement for at least one biodiversity enhancement feature at every Town Council managed site (e.g. bird boxes, bat boxes, ponds, bee banks, deadwood habitat or pollinator planting).
- ii. Install interpretation signage at biodiversity project sites to educate residents and visitors about habitat management and local wildlife.
- iii. Establish a formal annual biodiversity monitoring report measuring habitat creation, species records, volunteer engagement and biodiversity improvements.

- iv. Investigate opportunities for rain gardens, wildlife ponds and sustainable drainage planting within parks and public spaces to improve biodiversity and flood resilience.
- v. Increase the use of native tree and hedge planting across Council-managed land to improve habitat connectivity and climate resilience.
- vi. "Think Green" when considering the transfer of all future TDC/DCC assets.

The Working Group was invited to suggest additional actions for inclusion within the Biodiversity Action Plan.

- Town Quay: Members discussed biodiversity opportunities at Town Quay, although it was acknowledged that potential is limited due to the heavily shaded environment. Options will continue to be explored.
- River Lemon: It was noted that previously abandoned planting beds on the opposite side of the River Lemon have now been planted.
- Tree Monitoring: Members asked whether the condition of trees is being monitored. It was confirmed that Newton Abbot Town Council trees are surveyed every three years.
- Penn Inn Roundabout: Members were reminded that the roundabout is managed by a Community Interest Company and is rich in wildflowers. Support is being sought to help raise awareness of the habitat and to identify funding opportunities. Grant application information is to be emailed to John Pike.
- Together for Tomorrow Project: The Chairperson and Betina introduced the "Together for Tomorrow" project, which aims to engage harder-to-reach members of the community. Discussion highlighted the importance of understanding existing community activity, networking, and sharing outcomes. Members noted the importance of involving the library and linking the project into the proposed Newton Abbot Green Trail initiative.
- Museum Trail: Thomas advised the museum recently hosted a biodiversity trail to help residents discover local species and learn where they can be found within the community.

Jane Camp provided a brief overview of the biodiversity work currently being undertaken by the Rotary Club. Discussion also took place regarding Rotary proposals to manage roundabouts. It was agreed that the Biodiversity Policy would be shared with Jane Camp as soon as possible.

5. NEXT STEPS

- Green Trail
- Report back to the C&H Committee in June
- Invited members to share ideas or requests meetings

Members stressed the importance of the Working Group maintaining a broad community focus and not becoming solely Council focussed.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Date to be agreed. Only meet as and when there is something substantial to discuss.

Meeting closed at: 11:40