

Newton Abbot Town Council



Biodiversity Policy

Date of adoption	Council 24 th January 2024 - Minute number 24/01()
Reviewed	
Next Review Date	February 2025
To be reviewed by	This policy will be reviewed annually by the Community & Heritage Committee, together with a summary of how the policy has been implemented in the previous twelve months.

Statutory Duty.

Under the [2021 Environment Act](#), public authorities (including town and parish councils) who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

[Government guidance](#) published in 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 requires all public authorities to complete their first consideration of what action to take for biodiversity by 1st January 2024. They must agree their policies and objectives as soon as possible after this and may reconsider the selected actions within 5 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 before the end of 2023.
- Note what action in respect of biodiversity is already taking place locally.
- Agree what further steps to take at this stage.

Such steps may include:

- Reviewing what biodiversity or nature recovery plans are already in place from other local authorities.
- Making contact with local voluntary groups working on nature conservation.
- Carrying out a biodiversity audit of council landholdings and/or the whole council area
- Gathering expert advice on possible actions in support of biodiversity.
- Drafting an action plan that covers action that the council will take itself as well as support for the actions of other local bodies.

Definition

According to Defra (Biodiversity 2020), Biodiversity is key to the survival of all life on Earth. Its loss deprives future generations of irreplaceable genetic information and compromises sustainability. Biodiversity is important for its own sake and human survival depends upon it.

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.

Introduction

Newton Abbot is a large historic market town and civil parish located in the Teignbridge District of South Devon. A rural town with a considerable number of green spaces including:

- Decoy Country Park – Green Flag award winning country park and local nature reserve.
- Courtenay Park – Green Flag award winning which features a pond with fountain, a sensory garden and a bandstand.
- Bakers Park - large open space on the outskirts of Newton Abbot.
- Bradley Manor Estate - an extensive National Trust estate with varied habitats including meadow, woodland, river and riparian areas.
- Forde Park - formal park in the centre of Newton Abbot. Features a tree trail which joins Courtenay Park with trees of notable interest such as the Giant Redwood and Lucombe Oak.
- Stover Country Park located on the outskirts of Newton Abbot contains 114 acres of woodland, lake and marsh, heathland, grassland and a substantial variety of wildlife. It is also designated as a dragonfly hotspot by the British Dragonfly Society.

The Town Council is responsible for grass cutting verges (devolved service from Devon County Council) and has responsibility for the clearing of a large number of footpaths throughout the parish area, in partnership with Devon County Council's Parish Paths Project. In addition, the Town Council owns various assets including:

- War Memorial
- Golden Lion Square
- St Leonard's Clock Tower
- Allotment sites (6)
- Victoria Gardens
- Newfoundland Way Public Conveniences
- Town Quay
- Vicary Mill Leat

Aims and Objectives

The object of this policy is to work towards enhancing and protecting the biodiversity of Newton Abbot. All committees of Newton Abbot Town Council will consider sustainability, environmental impact and biodiversity when making decisions and will develop and implement policies and strategies as required.

Newton Abbot Town Council will aim to improve the biodiversity of the area in the following ways:

- Identify short- medium- and long-term goals to minimise Newton Abbot Town Council's impact on the environment.
- Work in partnership with Devon County Council and Teignbridge District Council.
- 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 & Council operations in the adoption of low impact practices.
- Support residents and local organisation activities to enhance and promote biodiversity.

Actions Completed; so far!

Newton Abbot Town Council has:

- Adopted a [Neighbourhood Development Plan](#). Minute number 16/03(401). The plan identifies policies supporting:
 - Policy NANDP2 Quality of Design - Sustainable development including greening of the local environment, new development be accompanied by a landscaping scheme which will increase biodiversity, creation of open spaces and greening.
 - Policy NANDP3 Natural Environment and Biodiversity – retention of existing trees and hedgerows to be retained, details of planting of native species and details of how the site is to be managed to maximise biodiversity. Provision of cycleways and footpaths.
- Adopted a [Community Plan 2022-2032](#) with a core objective of adapting to, and mitigating against, the impact of climate change as a priority in all activities delivered or instigated by the Town Council. Minute number 22/07(275). The plan identifies projects, including:
 - Greening the Town.
 - Grow your own.
 - Greenspaces.
 - Support Infrastructure.
 - Charge It!
 - Spread the Word.
 - Promote walking and cycling.
- Raised awareness of Hedgehog Highways through the sharing of information and providing free hedgehog highway surrounds and guidance for residents. Minute number 23/03(445).
- Resolved to prohibit the use of pesticides across all Council assets and services. Minute number 23/11(305a).
- Expanded the pollinator friendly floral displays around the town.
- Actively supports and working in partnership with Green Futures Newton Abbot.
- Actively supports and working in partnership with Newton Abbot Allotment Community & District Association.
- Employs a Facilities Maintenance team to care for, protect and enhance the natural environment. Using battery powered equipment where possible.
- Composts, shreds and mulches green waste generated through the work of the Facilities Maintenance Team.
- Encourages residents and visitors to access to the natural environment through maintenance of local footpaths and provision of an online walking map.

Action Plan

Site/Objective	Action/Priority/Outcome	Priority	Progress
<p>Declare a Biodiversity Emergency</p>	<p>To recognise the importance of a healthy biodiverse environment for the future prosperity and the wellbeing of all who live, work and study in Newton Abbot.</p> <p>To pledge to provide leadership and to ensure that the Council works with all organisational departments, partners and our community to reverse the decline in biodiversity and deliver measurable biodiversity net gain within Newton Abbot.</p> <p>Set measurable targets and standards for biodiversity increase, seeking to increase community engagement with habitat creation such as bee banks and ponds.</p> <p>Small changes to how the Council manage areas to create habitats for wildlife and 'nature corridors' that connect existing habitats. This allows species to move between habitats, maintain or increase populations and be more resilient to climate change.</p> <p>Work in partnership with institutions, schools, businesses and community groups, to raise awareness and encourage wider biodiversity action across Newton Abbot.</p>	<p>High</p>	
<p>Planning</p>	<p>As a statutory consultee:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>It will support protection of sensitive habitats from development and will consider whether the development would mean the loss of important habitats for wildlife.</p>	<p>High</p>	

	<p>It will consider what each proposed development might make in terms of biodiversity net gain¹ (GOV.UK. n.d)</p> <p>It will include policies in support of biodiversity within the neighbourhood plan.</p> <p>Ensure that planning consultations are considered against the requirements of the Community Plan 2022 – 2032, Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan.</p>		
The Built Landscape	<p>Manage its land and activities using environmentally friendly practices that promote biodiversity and enhance habitats.</p> <p>Land and property management</p> <p>The council will carry out a biodiversity audit² of its landholdings.</p> <p>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 regard to cutting and removal of vegetation and timing of maintenance work.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The council will consider biodiversity issues and the implementation of changes when managing its buildings.</p>	High	
Printing	<p>Consider options to enable the reduction of printed agenda packs. Resulting in a reduction in stationery, postage, printing and utility costs and a more efficient use of staff time.</p>	Medium	
Grass Cutting	<p>Work with the County Council on verge management to reduce the frequency of grass cutting and consider leaving areas unmown.</p>	Medium	

¹ In England, biodiversity net gain is required under a statutory framework introduced by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (inserted by the Environment Act 2021). This is referred to as biodiversity net gain in Planning Practice Guidance to distinguish it from other or more general biodiversity gains.

² Producing a parish biodiversity audit supports the Council meeting their biodiversity duty under Section 40 (1) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. Local authorities have a key role to play in conserving biodiversity and the Act places the following duty on public authorities – ‘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 applies to all local authorities, including parish and town councils.

Wildflower Planting	Adopt a management plan and designate areas for wildflower planting.	Medium	
Water Conservation	Install tanks to harvest rainwater from Council buildings.	High	
Local community	<p>Engage with local businesses and residents regarding biodiversity in the community and how members of the community can assist and make a difference.</p> <p>Raise awareness of biodiversity issues and the importance of habitats for wildlife, such as gardens and highlight in the Council newsletter and social media.</p> <p>Create a page on the Council website for information and resources.</p> <p>Discourage floodlighting in rural areas.</p> <p>Where feasible, involve the community in biodiversity projects on its land including for example tree planting, wildflower meadows, birdbox making.</p>	High	
Culture	<p>Involve Officers, Councillors and residents in the implementation of this policy, for greater commitment.</p> <p>Encourage all Councillors and Officers to promote awareness of sustainable practices and to lead by example.</p>	High	
Partners	<p>Newton Abbot Town Council will work in partnership with Green Futures Newton Abbot and other organisations to protect, promote and enhance biodiversity within areas of the <i>parish</i>.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Support the Pesticide Free Bradley Project.</p>	High	

Short	Medium	Low
6 to 12 months	2 to 4 years	4 + years

Reference list

Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services. (n.d.). Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a78c263ed915d04220651ea/pb13583-biodiversity-strategy-2020-111111.pdf> [Accessed 11th Nov. 2023].

GOV.UK. (n.d.). *Draft biodiversity net gain planning practice guidance*. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/draft-biodiversity-net-gain-planning-practice-guidance>

Local Nature Action Plans: guidance for town and parish councils 2. (n.d.). Available at: <https://beta.southglos.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/Local-Nature-Action-Plans-guidance-for-town-and-parish-councils.pdf> [Accessed 19 Dec. 2023].

SLCC (2023). *RESPONSE TO THE BIODIVERSITY DUTY*. [online] Available at: <https://www.slcc.co.uk/site/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Model-biodiversity-policy-30-October-2023-1.pdf> [Accessed 19 Dec. 2023].