

Agenda item

Response to the Bio Diversity Duty

Introduction – Statutory Duty 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.

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 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.

Reference to SLCC for this document.