

BIODIVERSITY

Introduction - 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 in England.

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 they must agree their policies and objectives as soon as possible and may 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 should as a minimum:

- have biodiversity as an agenda item for a meeting;
- 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.

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

All these steps may inform an agreed biodiversity policy.

DUNSFORD PARISH BIODIVERSITY POLICY

Adopted October 2024

PREAMBLE

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, Dunsford Parish Council will, in exercising all its functions, have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.

This duty also means that the Parish Council 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.

Biodiversity is important for its own sake and has its own intrinsic value. A number of studies have shown this value also goes further. 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.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The object of this policy is to work towards enhancing and protecting the biodiversity of Dunsford Parish.

Dunsford Parish Council will consider sustainability, environmental impact and biodiversity when making decisions and will develop and implement policies and strategies as required.

Dunsford Parish Council will aim to improve the biodiversity of the area in the following ways:

- considering the potential impact on biodiversity represented by planning applications;
- supporting residents, local stakeholders and local organisations activities to enhance and promote biodiversity;
- minimising the carbon footprint in Dunsford;
- networking with residents, other local Parish Councils and Environmental Organisations to maximise benefits where possible.

ACTIONS

Planning applications

- 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.

- It will support protection of sensitive habitats from development and will oppose development which would mean the loss of important habitats for wildlife in respect of all applications. It will give particular weight to effects on bat habitats and other rare species.
- It will consider what contribution each proposed development might make in terms of biodiversity net gain.
- It will include policies in support of biodiversity within the neighbourhood plan.

Dunsford Climate Initiative (DCI) Group

- The council will use the DCI Group to oversee and lead its approach to biodiversity issues within the Parish.

Wildlife Wardens

- The council will draw on the advice of the Wildlife Wardens on measures to improve biodiversity and support their work towards this objective.

Land and Property Management

- Dunsford Parish Council owns the Village Green and will consider carrying out a biodiversity audit of the Green as well as the whole of Dunsford Parish.
- Dunsford Parish Council will as far as possible consult with and encourage those involved in the upkeep of the churchyard, the area outside The Orchard, farmland, private land and gardens, to support the goals in the action plan.

Local community

- The Council will raise public awareness of biodiversity issues, including through its website and the Unity parish magazine.
- The council will engage with local businesses, farmers and residents regarding biodiversity in the community to explore opportunities for how members of the community can assist and make a difference.
- It will, where feasible and appropriate, encourage the community to consider biodiversity and promote wildlife; for example tree planting, establishment of wildflower meadows, environmental protection projects, re-wilding and use of items that support wildlife such as bird-boxes and swift bricks.

Partners

- Dunsford Parish Council will continue to support the DCI Group and our Wildlife Wardens and will work in partnership with other organisations, including Teignbridge District Council, to protect, promote and enhance biodiversity within Dunsford Parish and the surrounding areas.
- 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) (such as Dunsford Nature Reserve) and consider how it may become more involved in implementing the strategies' recommendations and/or support local sites.

This policy will be reviewed each year at a DCI meeting and reported back to the parish council at the Annual Council Meeting, together with a summary of how the policy has been implemented in the previous twelve months.

ACTION PLAN

Site or Objective	Action	Outcome	Target (Years)	Reporting / Publicity
Raise local awareness of biodiversity in whole parish.	Hold community events, e.g. moth-trapping, bat-detecting.	Gain local support for action.	Ongoing	Website. Parish Unity magazine.
	Develop a parish biodiversity database by combining records made by residents.		Two years	Website. Parish Unity magazine. Displays in village hall and bus shelter.
	Buy and promote use of Parish wildlife camera.		1 year	Parish Unity magazine. Displays in village hall and bus shelter.
Private Gardens	Encourage good practice for increased biodiversity	Increased biodiversity	Ongoing	Parish Unity magazine articles
Cemetery / churchyard.	Encourage and support PCC in greening the churchyard, supporting eco church award initiatives	Increased diversity of habitats and food sources for pollinators, birds and small mammals.	Ongoing	PCC responsibility.
	Maintain swift boxes in church tower.	Swifts nesting in the Parish	Ongoing	
Village Green.	Encourage and support council in improving habitats.	Increased diversity of habitats and food sources for pollinators, birds and small mammals.	Ongoing	Council responsibility.
The Built Landscape	Support site and building design in planning applications that benefit biodiversity through the conservation and integration of existing habitats or provision of new habitats.	Maintaining Dunsford's diverse bat population.	Ongoing	Annual Report to summarise responses to planning applications.
	Oppose those that damage biodiversity.			Via planning responses.

Site or Objective	Action	Outcome	Target (Years)	Reporting / Publicity
	Reduce light pollution by (a) pressing TDC to block blue light from streetlights and (b) informing residents of best practice in outside lighting and reducing light spill.	Street lights emitting orange light. Reduced light spill from residential lights. Benefits to moth and bat populations.	1 year	Parish council responsibility Best practice articles in Unity magazine.
	Encourage hedgehog/ small animal highways with permeable boundaries.	Free movement between gardens for small animals	Ongoing	Parish Council. Best practice articles in Unity magazine.
	Encourage the use of swift bricks in new building work.	More nest sites for swifts	Ongoing	
Farmland	Engage with farmers to understand their priorities and what they are already doing for biodiversity. Encourage farmers to use less pesticides Provide up-to-date information on grants for changes that can benefit wildlife, e.g. in hedge management.	Improved and more connected habitats for wildlife	Ongoing	Direct contact between councillors and farmers/landowner s. Sharing of best practice.
Dunsford Nature Reserve	Support the work of Devon Wildlife Trust in managing the Nature reserve.	Healthy woodland habitat	Ongoing	