Biodiversity Policy

Adopted by:	Watton Town Council
Date:	19th January 2024
Reviewed:	11th August 2026

1. 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, Watton Town 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 means that town and parish councils are able to spend funds in conserving biodiversity, in a joint effort across multiple sectors and authorities.

2. 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.

Biodiversity is the foundation block of our 'ecosystems' that provide us with a wide range of essentials that support our economic and social wellbeing. These include 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. Going above and beyond what is required by law to enhance and protect biodiversity can save money, resources and in extreme cases, the lives of our residents.

3. 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 and habitat loss represented by planning applications with the knowledge available to the council.
- When financially viable *to* manage its land and property using environmentally friendly practices that will promote biodiversity.
- Encourage and support other organisations within the town to manage their areas of responsibility with biodiversity in mind.
- Raise awareness of biodiversity success stories, or large-scale ecological changes within the town. To help inform residents and local organisations and promote biodiversity.
- To endeavour to protect public footpaths within the geographical town area from development and ensure that they are maintained to a proper degree of safety by the relevant authorities. Footpaths are vital to the enjoyment of open space and accessibility of residents.
- To acknowledge the importance of green and blue infrastructure. Green and blue infrastructure is multi-functional and benefits people and nature. It makes active travel routes more attractive and helps to create social and community spaces. It also helps to enhance biodiversity and benefits the wider environment. Watton has faced major flooding events in the past, although some work has been carried out, some areas still flood. (The WSP project carried out detailed surveys of flooding in Watton.)

(There is no recourse in the Council that can implement the pursuit of low impact / nature positive practises or maintenance by local business, especially as most local business do not have access to any green or open space. In addition, the town council only offers grants to charitable organisations.)

Town Council ACTIONS:

Planning:

- Support designs that benefits biodiversity through the conservation and integration of existing habitats or provision of new habitats.

- Support designs that contribute towards nature recovery in Norfolk by protecting and strengthening ecological networks, delivering ambitious biodiversity net gain (more than the minimum of 10%) while ensuring the protection of internationally, nationally and locally designated sites.

- Seek public opinion or/and expert advice on ecology when commenting on planning applications adjacent to local protected sites or valued local green spaces. A 'local protected site' is defined as a non-statutory area designated for nature conservation, relying on local planning policies and voluntary management for protection.

• 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. Sensitive habitats are defined as the specific areas within the geographical area historically or currently occupied by a species or community of species in which are found those physical or biological features essential to the establishment or continued existence of the species and which may require special management, conservation or protection considerations.

• Have regard for the objectives within Watton Neighbourhood Plan.

Land and property management:

• Carry out a biodiversity audit of its landholdings as and when required by the Council or any committee of the Council.

• Carry out an outdoor asset list audit when required by the Council or any committee of the Council.

• Consider the conservation and promotion of local biodiversity management in open spaces. When financially viable this will include adopting beneficial practices with regarding to cutting and removal of vegetation, application of chemicals and timing of maintenance work and paying attention to the Government's regulations for plant protection products. Also considering the balance between recreational and green space.

• 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, or locally made materials when procuring supplies for the Council's use.

• Consider sustainability issues and the implementation of changes when managing its buildings.

• When delivering on changes to land and property adjacent to highways, to consult the authority responsible for highways where appropriate.

Local community:

• Raise public awareness of biodiversity issues and success stories, including through its website, the local newspaper, online and through collaboration with partners.

(There is no recourse or specific expertise in the Council that can implement engaging and informing members of the community on how to 'assist and make a difference'. This does not prevent us from engaging on individual basis – but it is not something we can adequately fulfil. The following policy ensures communication with the community continues regardless.)

• Where feasible, involve the community in biodiversity or maintenance projects on its land including for example tree planting, wildflower meadows, bird box making, clearing invasive species or litter picking.

The Council will seek to work in partnership with key stakeholders to protect, promote and enhance biodiversity within the council area. Full Council delegates where appropriate, a lead councillor, or working group to support the Councils functions.

Any delegation of the Council can review any local nature recovery strategies, species conservation strategies, or protected site strategies in respect of local 'Sites of Special Scientific Interest' (SSSIs) and suggest how the Council may become more involved in implementing the strategies' recommendations.

4. MONITORING:

This policy was adopted on 19th January 2024 (Minute reference 9) and will be reviewed in two years or sooner should legislation dictate, or if required by Full Council. Reviews of the Biodiversity Policy can be undertaken by a committee of the Council to then be ratified by Full Council

Town Councils are exempt from legislation (NERC Act 2006) that requires reports of biodiversity policy action.

(No summary on this policy has ever been made or implemented. There is no need for any report or summary to be made as parish and town councils are exempt from this legislation which requires larger authorities to comply with the full NERC Act 2006.The current working group reports its findings and motions to full council following every meeting regardless.)