

Chepping Wycombe Parish Council

Biodiversity Strategy – Key Areas of Focus



Introduction

Our natural environment is one of our parish's greatest assets. The variety of plants, animals and habitats we enjoy locally not only enriches the lives of residents but also plays a crucial role in supporting our health, well-being, and resilience to environmental challenges.

In recent years, concerns about the decline of biodiversity have grown, with habitats across the UK under increasing pressure from development, pollution, and climate change. Recognising the importance of taking action, this document sets out some key areas of focus to drive and inform specific measures the council will take to protect and enhance the unique natural heritage of our area.

Through collaboration with residents, community groups, and other local organisations, we aim to create a legacy of biodiversity that future generations of residents will value and benefit from.

Notes about this document

This document follows a series of contextual reports commissioned by Chepping Wycombe Parish Council and produced by the Chiltern Rangers. In response, CWPC has established a Biodiversity Working Group of six councillors chaired by the Vice Chair of the Open Spaces Committee.

The document sets out the key areas of focus for biodiversity initiatives as agreed by the Working Group. These key areas will be used by the Open Spaces Committee and Full Council to help councillors consider and if so minded approve more specific measures throughout the year as they are brought to committee.

All of the key focus areas set out below, with the exception of the River Wye and Highways Verges, apply to one of three main types of open space across the parish: **Woodlands, Commons** and **Recreation Grounds / Amenity Land**. Other land use types including allotments, cemeteries and sports ground may also benefit from some of the measures set out below but, by their nature, have less biodiversity value.

It is important to note that actions aligned to many of the core areas of focus below will also be supported by individual site plans.

Key Factors for consideration for any proposed actions

As stated above, specific actions taken in line with the key focus areas set out in this document will be subject to approval by councillors at committee stage. The factors listed in this section below have been used to inform the creation of the key focus areas for biodiversity and should continue to be used to measure both the initial viability and subsequent effectiveness of more specific measures introduced across the parish. Whilst promoting greater biodiversity is the ultimate aim of such measures, health and safety must always be the primary focus and the additional factors listed below should always be considered fully:

- Health and Safety
- Promoting Biodiversity across the Parish
- Accessibility
- Preserving Sightlines and Visibility
- Appropriate seasonality and timing of work
- Funding
- Recognition and Awards (e.g. Green Flag)
- Ensuring an even spread of biodiversity initiatives and activities across CWPC's three wards

Key Areas of Focus

The remainder of this document sets out seven key focus areas for biodiversity initiatives. Against many of these items, Chepping Wycombe Parish Council is already engaged in specific measures which align to them, whereas some items require additional activities to be agreed. This set of focus areas is not exhaustive and should not restrict the council in considering other measures as they come forward.

1. Highways Verges

Planting wildflowers along highway verges and reducing mowing frequency can benefit biodiversity by providing essential habitats for pollinators like bees and butterflies, creating green 'wildlife corridors' to enable wildlife to move between habitats, and also support native plant species. These actions reduce can habitat loss, improve ecosystem connectivity and enhance the visual appeal of verges.

This action would involve planting wildflowers along highways verges and, with the exception of a strip left between the planting and any pathways, leaving these unmowed until September / October time.

It is important to note that the council does not own a 'cut and collect' machine, and so the mowing work in the autumn would have to be sub-contracted to a third party.

Health and Safety is a particularly important factor here to ensure that any unmowed verges do not impact visibility for road users.

An initial strip of wildflower planting along Green Dragon Lane, Flackwell Heath has already been completed by the Chiltern Rangers. It is therefore proposed that Chiltern Rangers complete further wildflower planting on highways verges in Flackwell Heath in the first instance, in specific locations to be agreed by the Open Spaces Committee. This action could then be extended across the other two wards if deemed to be effective and appropriate.

2. Woodland Management

Woodland sites need to be managed to deal with a variety of user groups and factors in mind. Each site should have its own plan that would involve with the Forestry Commission to ensure the relevant felling licenses are secured. This may also be an area to consider applying for various grant schemes to offset some of the management costs.

Three key measures already underway which we should continue and consider extending are: thinning, retaining lying dead wood and scalloping woodland edges.

Woodland thinning improves tree health, supports biodiversity, boosts carbon storage, reduces wildfire risks, and aids forest regeneration.

Scalloping woodland edges – making them wavy instead of straight – boosts biodiversity by creating varied habitats with more sunlight and shelter. It supports a mix of plants, insects, birds and small animals.

Retaining around 10-15% of standing (and some fallen) deadwood makes it harder for deer to browse saplings, whilst tidy log piles can provide habitats for hedgehogs, beetles and other wildlife.

The above activities are already underway in Kings Wood and The Common and a sensible proposal would be to continue and extend such activities, and consider their appropriate application to parts of the Railway Land and Magpie Wood in Loudwater.

3. Bat and Bird Boxes

Installing bat boxes provides safe roosting spaces for bats, helping to conserve this threatened species and enhance biodiversity. Bats play a key role in ecosystems by

controlling insects, pollinating plants, and dispersing seeds. Bat boxes also support wildlife in urban areas and raise awareness of bats' ecological importance.

Birds enhance local ecosystems as they play roles in seed dispersal, insect control, and pollination. Bird boxes are also crucial to compensate for habitat loss, as modern building designs have reduced natural nesting sites for birds. Bird boxes also provide safe spaces for species in decline, such as house sparrows, starlings, and swifts. It is also important to note that installing bird boxes can encourage public engagement with biodiversity. Installing bird boxes can help people connect with nature and fosters an awareness of bird conservation.

A sensible proposal would be to conduct a bat survey across the parish in the first instance to inform the most appropriate locations for bat boxes to be installed. It would also be sensible to consider the installation of further bird boxes across all three wards of the parish including King's Wood, Derehams, The Common – Tylers Green, Magpie Wood and Chapel Road – Flackwell Heath, as well as in pavilions owned and managed by the council.

4. Native Trees

In addition to supporting wildlife, native trees are better adapted to local soil, climate, and pests, making them more resilient to environmental changes and diseases. They also support healthier soils by encouraging beneficial microbes and preventing soil erosion. Native trees are also significant to our local cultural heritage, maintaining the natural landscape and cultural identity of our parish.

CWPC already prioritises the planting of native species when any new tree planting occurs and this action should continue. Focus areas should include The Common in Tylers Green, the picnic area next to the CWPC offices, further planting in Derehams and planting more cherry trees in Flackwell Heath.

5. The River Wye

Flowing through Loudwater, the River Wye is one of 9 chalk streams in the Chilterns and one of only 200 globally. The management of the river is subject to further specific work and action plans delivered by working in partnership with Chiltern Chalk Stream Project (CCSP) to identify and deliver specific habitat improvements under FRAP licenses from the Environment Agency. For example, woody debris berms, deflectors & tree sweepers.

CWPC's work should include supporting the activities of existing organisations and volunteer groups and further engagement by the Biodiversity Working Group with the

CCSP and the 'Revive the Wye' project should be considered key actions as part of this focus area.

Key activities the council should look to support include keeping the stream clear of litter and major obstructions. All invasive non-native species (INNS) such as Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed should be removed as soon as they are encountered. American Signal Crayfish can be trapped & dispatched under permit from the EA.

6. Planting in Recreation Grounds and Amenity Areas

This focus area includes two key activities: planting in semi-formal areas within recreation grounds and amenity land as well as 'beefing up' boundaries and hedgerows.

Semi-formal areas can be planted with spring bulbs for colour and pollinator benefit as well as creating wildflower strips and 'mini meadows'. Sightlines are very important considerations here, so people can see in and out of recreational land. Visibility is important in reducing the fear of being attacked – something which is especially important for women, and planting must be conducted with this in mind. Areas within recreational spaces across all three wards of the parish should be considered for spring-bulb planting, as well as in the Altona Road and Cock Lane cemeteries.

Hedgerows act as important wildlife habitats and, beginning with the work to plant more hedgerows on Orchard Green, Flackwell Heath, the council should consider further planting of hedgerows in other amenity areas within the parish where appropriate.

Lastly, the boundaries of recreation sites can also be 'beefed up' to reduce anti-social behaviour through the planting of thorny thickets and scrubby coppice margins. A sensible initial action would be to plant some blackthorn on the recreation ground in Flackwell Heath and assess its effectiveness.

7. Management of Grey Squirrels

Grey squirrels displace the native red squirrel, which is already vulnerable in the UK, and so managing grey squirrels can help preserve red squirrel populations. Grey squirrels can also damage trees by stripping their bark, impacting the health of woodland and they can also cause damage to crops and orchards, leading to losses for farmers and gardeners. They also carry diseases like squirrel pox, which threaten other wildlife.

The Chiltern Rangers currently organise volunteers to control Grey Squirrels in the woodland either side of Kings Wood, to reduce damage to the trees and the predation of

nesting birds. A sensible proposal may be to work with the Chiltern Rangers to fund a feeding station and some bait, to enable their volunteers to extend their work into Kings Wood. This action could then be extended across other woodland areas in the parish if deemed appropriate.

Matrix of Key Areas of Focus across CWPC's three wards

		CWPC Wards		
		Flackwell Heath	Loudwater	Tylers Green
Key Areas of Focus	1. Highways Verges			
	2. Woodland Management			
	3. Bat and Bird Boxes			
	4. Native Trees			
	5. The River Wye			
	6. Planting in Amenity Areas			
	7. Management of Grey Squirrels			