



Parish Councils and Biodiversity

The Requirement for Parish Councils to act on Biodiversity

Under Section 102 of the Environment Act 2021 parish councils (like other public authorities) have a general duty to both conserve and enhance biodiversity. They should have first considered this duty before 1 January 2024 and now must agree on policies and objectives as soon as possible.

Danby Group Parish Council was the first in our area to adopt its new Biodiversity Policy in December 2023. Their policy can be seen [here](#). By May 2024 four other local parish councils are known to have adopted policies and more can be expected to follow suit in the next few months. It is likely that all will be quite similar to the one adopted by Danby. Two other local examples can be seen online so far: [Eskdaleside cum Ugglebarnby](#) and [Ugthorpe and Hutton Mulgrave](#).

If parish councils have not yet adopted a biodiversity policy they may find the local examples useful but there are other sources of advice.

Guidance from DEFRA was published on 17 May 2023 and is available on the Government web page [Complying with the biodiversity duty](#).

The Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) published a web page on 31 May 2023 giving a summary, [New Government Guidance on Biodiversity](#). On 30 October 2023 they published a [Response to the Biodiversity Policy](#). This document explains the new statutory duty and then provides a Model Biodiversity Policy. There is similarity to this model and the [policy adopted by Danby Parish Council](#).

One Clerk that we contacted claimed that Town and Parish Councils are exempt from the requirement to develop a policy. It is correct that they can agree a set of objectives instead of a policy, but they are not exempt from one or the other. They are however exempt from the requirement that applies to other authorities to publish a report on their actions. Other Town and Parish Councils could also be confused about this aspect of the requirements.

Putting Parish Biodiversity Policies into Practice

Parish Councils had an opportunity to hear what they can do to make a difference at the National Park area forums in the Autumn of 2023. The slides from the presentation *Meadows, verges and boundaries: connecting Parishes through nature* can be seen [here](#).

From outside our area important action began with [Harleston Town Council](#) in Norfolk following the wish of local people to define the parish as a Nature Recovery Area. An account of what has happened so far is given in an [article in the North Yorks Moors Association magazine Voice of the Moors – Winter 23-24 edition](#). Further information is given on the website [Nature Recovery in Harleston](#).

Following the adoption of the Biodiversity Policy in Danby supporters of the Community Earth Project attended the Annual Parish Meeting to ask the Council to reduce grass cutting on two roads in the centre of the village to allow wild flowers to flower and set seed. The Council agreed so no mowing will take place this year until late summer. The cuttings will then be raked up and removed to reduce fertility and help improve nature on the road verges for the future.

How you can help

Encouragement to adopt nature recovery practices such as good grass verge or hedge management, in line with their biodiversity policy, is most likely to be considered if it comes from a resident of the parish. The Community Earth Project is encouraging local people to engage with their parish councils to promote action.

The first step is to find out whether or not your parish or town council has adopted a biodiversity policy or strategy. If you cannot find out from the council website the next step is to contact the clerk. If the clerk is not aware of the need for a policy make use of the information in this document to explain what the council needs to do. Once a policy is adopted it is best practice for it to be published on the council website so that residents know about it. If you succeed in getting a policy adopted and published do let the Community Earth Project know where it can be seen.

Once a policy has been adopted it should be easier to encourage the council to take action to help nature recovery. It can be useful to work with local botanists or other naturalists to advise the council on what to do. If you can work with others in the parish to volunteer practical help with conservation tasks this may also help to encourage the council to act. Again do let the Community Earth Project know about your achievements.

