

Wilton Town Council

DEVELOPING A BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN (BAP)

Introduction

Under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, Wilton Town Council has a duty to conserve biodiversity. Notwithstanding this, there is real enthusiasm in the Town for more environmental projects.

The Wilton Wildlife Group (WWG) managed by Maria La Femina has 163 members and actively records wildlife sightings on its dedicated Facebook site, manages habitats and undertakes projects around the Town. Maria has asked if the Council can help support and promote the group's biodiversity work. So far, the Council has helped by purchasing equipment that has been loaned to the group. However the time might be right for the Council to take a more proactive approach to biodiversity and sustainability.

Biodiversity is all about protecting and enhancing local habitats, ecosystems and species, but the environment is also a valuable resource for local people - promoting physical and mental wellbeing, education and social connections.

Promoting biodiversity sits alongside wider sustainability and climate change initiatives.

The Council has already signalled its willingness to embrace its environmental stewardship role, it has introduced solar panels at the pavilion, switched to green energy, allocated funds for electric car charging points, experimented with wildflower planting in its parks and supported a sustainable local milk machine in South Street Car Park. However, there is much more that can be done.

An initial partnership meeting was held in August, with Town Council representatives, WWG, U3A and Wiltshire Wildlife attending. There was a great deal of enthusiasm for the creation of a Biodiversity Action Plan.

Alongside this work, the Wiltshire Neighbourhood Planning Group (NPG) has appointed planning consultants and will shortly be undertaking consultation with local residents. Timing is perfect to join up these two strands of work – biodiversity and sustainability will be core elements of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Wiltshire Wildlife has offered to support the biodiversity work, undertaking site appraisals and audits. The Council has also worked with Becky Twigg of the Salisbury Bee project, who has offered similar assistance, and it will be important to keep everyone involved.

Producing a biodiversity action plan can be a daunting process. Examples readily available on the internet often run to 30 pages or more and are packed with technical detail. This may be too big an ask for local volunteers and the Council might want to support a more pragmatic approach based on a simple action focused plan.

An approach that might work well in Wilton is to build on what we have already. The following is suggested:

- Form a Steering Group of local stakeholders
- Support existing groups and work alongside the NPG
- Commission a biodiversity audit from a local provider
- Identify priority themes
- Create a plan with a simple list of SMART actions
- Monitor outcomes