

Neighbourhood Plans and Biodiversity

[Neighbourhood Plans](#) can be created by Parish Councils under the [Localism Act 2011](#). They are a valuable way for a Parish Council to seek protection and enhancement of biodiversity in the local area because, if passed by local referendum, they then have legal status and form part of the wider local authority's development plan.

Neighbourhood Plans can contain a vision for your area as well as specific planning policies. It's important to consider biodiversity when drawing up your Plan.

Things to consider

- Is there an opportunity to enhance wildlife and green spaces within the neighbourhood?
- Are there areas or species which are protected by law ?
- Does your Neighbourhood Plan comply with biodiversity policies set out in your District's Local Plan?
- Does the spirit and detail of the Plan comply with the legal duty to 'have regard' for biodiversity under Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006 ?

Guidance on each of these is given elsewhere in this series but the following steps can help you to get started:

- Find out what biodiversity is in your area (information about what to look for and where to find it can be found in the **Commenting on Planning Applications** document; just change the search area to include the Parish boundary plus a buffer).
- Produce a map of what you already have.
- Create policies and plans to:
 - ⇒ Protect wildlife already present on sites chosen for development.
 - ⇒ Enhance existing wildlife areas in your neighbourhood (for example, by creating wildlife corridors to link up habitats).
 - ⇒ Protect designated sites and protected species from new development, for example by implementing 'buffer zones' around sites to minimise the impacts of nearby developments.
 - ⇒ Improve habitats for wildlife on development sites.
- Ensure that conditions to protect and enhance wildlife are included within Neighbourhood Plans and Development Orders. This should strengthen the obligation for developers to make provision for wildlife within the development before they are granted full planning permission through a Neighbourhood Order.

New Developments

Ask that conditions to protect and enhance wildlife are included with development proposals. This means the developer will have to agree to make provision for nature within the development before they are granted full planning permission.

Even small scale developments could contribute significantly to creating and enhancing local wildlife habitat. This may be by:

- Including bird and bat boxes on new buildings
- Using native plants in landscaping schemes
- Using climbing plants on walls which can provide shelter and foraging opportunities for wildlife
- Planting three trees to replace every tree that is removed. This wouldn't be suitable for ancient woodland or veteran trees as these are irreplaceable, and also make sure that tree planting will not damage or destroy a less obvious but already valuable wildlife habitat, such as grasslands or road verges. See the **Trees** leaflet for further information.
- Adding a 'green roof' to new buildings.
- Creating new habitat such as woodland, wetland, wildflower meadows or other wildlife habitats.

Ensure that new developments include Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) that benefit wildlife. With the increasing threat of more extreme weather events due to climate change, it is now very important that Neighbourhood Plans consider correct water management. Good SuDS schemes not only help with water management to prevent flooding but also benefit wildlife for little or no extra cost.

The RSPB and Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) have produced a great information booklet that you could direct people to when they are designing SuDS schemes.

Look at how future developments can offer gains for existing green space through management, survey and monitoring.

When creating your Plan you should:

- Identify the threats to local biodiversity and whether you can influence them
- Set out a vision for the biodiversity of the Parish
- Set timescales and agree areas of responsibility
- Work with the Leicestershire and Rutland Local Wildlife Sites Panel to determine whether any valuable sites merit designation as a [Local Wildlife Site](#). Designating land can give it more 'official' status as a site that is important for biodiversity.
- Consider paying professional ecologists to review your site; alternatively contact suitably qualified and independent volunteers to assess the biodiversity value of a site. Some Universities and higher education institutions may also be able to assist.

Funding

There is currently funding available to help communities produce Neighbourhood Plans. Grants of up to £9,000 are available from **Locality** to Parish Councils (see <http://locality.org.uk/projects/building-community/>) and it is also possible to secure up to £10,000 from **Awards for All** (<http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/funding/Awards-For-All>). Locality also offers free expert help including technical support.

Further Information

Government guidance on Neighbourhood Plans

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2>

The Localism Act 2011

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted>

Step-by-step guide to Neighbourhood Plans

https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/NP_Roadmap_online_full.pdf

Guidance from CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England)

<https://www.planninghelp.cpre.org.uk/improve-where-you-live/shape-your-local-area/neighbourhood-plans/what-is-neighbourhood-planning>

Sustainable Drainage Systems - guidance from RSPB and WWT

www.rspb.org.uk/Images/SuDS_report_final_tcm9-338064.pdf

The Green Roof Guide

<http://www.greenroofguide.co.uk/>