

MOULSFORD PARISH COUNCIL

Biodiversity Policy

Adopted Date: 10th October 2024

Next Review due: October 2026

1. Introduction

Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 there is a duty on public authorities in England, including Parish Councils to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of their policy or decision making.

This was further strengthened by the Environment Act 2021 so public authorities must now consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. This means a public authority must:

- Consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on their consideration
- Act to deliver policies and achieve objectives

Town and parish councils, unlike other authorities, are not obliged to publish a report on their actions, but the Government guidance requires all public authorities to complete their first consideration of what action to take for biodiversity by 1 January 2024.

They must agree their policies and objectives as soon as possible after this and must reconsider the selected actions within five years of completing their previous consideration, or more frequently if they choose.

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 everywhere, in gardens, fields, hedgerows, mountains rivers and the sea. Biodiversity is important for its own sake and has its own intrinsic value.

A number of studies have shown this value also goes further. Biodiversity is the building block of our 'ecosystems' that in turn provide us with a wide range of goods and services that support our economic and social wellbeing. These include essentials such as 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.

3. The Local Area

Moulsford Parish Council is a small rural village, with a considerable number of natural areas, including hedges, ditches, farmland, and the river Thames at its eastern boundary. Part of it also falls into an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which is now known as an area of National Landscape. That is, an area of countryside that has been designated for conservation due to its significant landscape value.

4. Parish Council responsibilities

The Parish Council owns one piece of land in Moulsford - the recreation ground abutting the A329. We also lease allotment plots from SODC lying just off Underhill.

The Parish Council is also responsible for the grass cutting on behalf of OCC and a map of verges covered is available online.

5. Aims and Objectives.

The object of this policy is to work towards conserving and enhancing the biodiversity of the Council's area. The Parish Council will consider sustainability, environmental impact and biodiversity when making decisions and will develop and implement policies and strategies as required.

6. Actions

The Parish Council will aim to improve the biodiversity of the area in the following ways:

- Consider the impact on biodiversity in the decisions made through the Parish Council, especially when commenting on planning applications. Support site and building design that benefits biodiversity through the conservation and integration of existing habitats or provision of new habitats. 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. They will consider what each proposed development might make in terms of biodiversity net gain
- Consider the impact on biodiversity in the decisions made by partners including the Environment Agency (responsible for the River Thames) and Natural England through OCC (responsible for the Thames Path)

- Manage its land and property using environmentally friendly practices that will promote biodiversity. This will include adopting beneficial practices with regarding to cutting and removal of vegetation, application of chemicals and timing of maintenance work, paying attention to the Government's regulations for plant protection products
- Take care in the specification of grounds maintenance contracts to ensure that the work, whilst reaching acceptable standards, does not harm the natural environment
- Consider biodiversity issues and the implementation of changes when managing the Village Pavilion
- Agree what further steps we could take to conserve and enhance biodiversity
- Review what biodiversity or nature recovery plans are already in place in other local authorities

Further down the line, we would also like to explore:

- Making contact with local voluntary groups working on nature conservation
- Carrying out a biodiversity audit of council landholdings
- Gather expert advice on other possible actions in support of biodiversity

Managing the Recreation Ground

The Parish Council will review how it manages the recreation ground on a regular basis; seeking to balance the needs of the habitat with the wishes of the villagers. This may include but is not limited to:

- Leaving standing and fallen dead wood as a habitat for invertebrates
- Leaving leaf litter and dead vegetation wherever possible as a habitat for invertebrates
- Removing invasive and non-invasive species that are detrimental to native flora or fauna as required
- Establishing a margin of uncut grass along the fence line bordering the houses (south side of recreation ground) to allow longer grasses and wildflowers to grow
- Extending existing and/or creating additional areas of longer grass and wildflowers to increase habitat provision

- Allowing fallen tree branches to remain if safe, to allow invertebrates to inhabit them
- Continuing to support the wildflower meadow in the north east corner of the recreation ground
- Hedge and grass cutting on and around the recreation ground takes place regularly through the spring and summer and is very much a balancing act between protecting the habitat and keeping the area open for walkers, children using the play area, football activities, etc.

Managing the allotments

Current status:

- The Parish Council leases the allotment plots from SODC
- Some are very overgrown and already “gone wild” – including the land at the side of SODC garages and the one immediately adjacent to this

Going forwards:

Once the new lease has been finalised with SODC, Moultsford Parish Council needs to determine how it manages the allotments. In particular:

- Determining which areas will be cultivated going forwards, and which left to “rewild”. This requires assessing how to reduce the invasion of weeds etc into cultivated plots (perhaps by establishing a margin between the different areas)
- Requesting allotment holders to adopt beneficial practices with regarding to cutting and removal of vegetation, application of chemicals and timing of maintenance work
- Updating the allotment lease agreement signed between Moultsford Parish Council and the villager leasing the plot, to reinforce these practices
- Developing a sustainable method of managing common areas in the allotments e.g. around the sewage plant fencing, along the north side where the area is shaded by conifers, etc.

7. Monitoring and Review

This policy was adopted on *10th October 2024* at a meeting of Moultsford Parish Council and will be reviewed every two years or sooner should legislation dictate. An action plan will be developed over the coming year and a summary of how the policy has been implemented will be reported annually to show progress against that action plan.