



# Local planning with biodiversity and wildlife in mind

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- Nicola Thomas Bucks & MK NEP
- Annie Ottaway BBOWT
- Councillor Jane MacBean Chesham Town

#### Local planning with biodiversity and wildlife in mind a talk for parishes in Berks, Bucks and Oxon

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Wild Parishes

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About me

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Founder and chair of resident-led <u>wildmaidenhead.org.uk</u> biodiversity charity

Formerly

Parish Councillor and Chair in Cookham, Berkshire

Senior Biodiversity and Planning Officer (Bucks, maternity cover)

Berkshire Buckinghamshire Orfendation Home







# What is biodiversity and why is it important?

"the variety and abundance of life"

Key components of our self-regulating planetary system - no biodiversity, no us!

- UK one if the most nature-depleted
- State of Nature reports severe decline
- lost half of ponds
- lost 97% wildflower meadows
- **75% loss of flying insect biomass** (Leather 2017, Annals of Applied Biology)
- 25% mammals at risk of extinction

Better, bigger, more, joined - Lawton report, 2010



#### Figure 5. Enhancing ecological networks

Approaches include: improving the quality of habitat patches (a); making existing sites bigger (b), which can include creating ecotones (c – see section 5.1.3); enhancing connectivity through a continuous corridor (d) or a stepping stone corridor (e); creating new sites (f); and reducing pressures on sites either by establishing buffer zones (g) or enhancing the wider environment (h).





# What is your role?

### Why are Parish Councils an important part of the solution?

- democratic legitimacy and leadership
- the biodiversity duty on all public authorities including parish councils to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of your policy or decision making
- community focal point
- planning committee work

### National policy context

- 25-year plan
- National Planning Policy Framework 2012, 2018
- Natural Environment Planning Policy Guidance, July 2019
- Environment Bill 2020
  - expands biodiversity duty to "conserve and enhance"
  - new biodiversity net gain requirement of 10% for developers
  - mandatory and maintained for 30 years
  - measured using a biodiversity metric of habitat areas
  - Local Nature Recovery Strategies for second tier authoritie

### National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019)

Paragraph of section 15	Quotable topic	Explanation
170, 174b	measurable biodiversity net gain	area and quality of habitat
175a	0	if can' t be avoided, onsite mitigation is best
170d, 171, 174	ecological networks	proximity to other habitats, wildlife corridors such as waterways or hedgerows
175	irreplaceable habitats	eg Ancient Woodlands and SSSIs - development within or outside likely to have an adverse effect not normally permitted



Poll



# Which county are you based in?

### Responding to planning applications

#### Seven steps to success for wildlife

- 1. Always use planning grounds NPPF, Local Plan, Neighbourhood Plan
- 2. Never assume officers are aware, OBJECT and ask for CONDITIONS
- 3. Require Biodiversity Net Gain in every application (sometimes above a minimum size)
- 4. Ecological Appraisal irreplaceable habitats, Priority Habitats and Priority Species
- 5. Know you Local Plan policies biodiversity, nature, tree, woodland, hedge, waterway, light pollution...
- 6. Ask for building enhancement conditions bat boxes, bird boxes, swift bricks, hedgehog corridors, green roofs, swales, native planting
- 7. Call for protection of waterways and Local Wildlife Sites eg 10m buffer



### Links and further reading

Planning Policy Guidance on Natural Environment (July 2019) https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#biodiversity-geodiversity-and-ecosystems: enhancements eg hedgehog corridors Paragraph: 023 Reference ID: 8-023-20190721; importance of Local Wildlife Sites for ecological networks and nature's recovery Paragraph: 012 Reference ID: 8-012-20190721

Local Wild Sites <a href="http://www.tverc.org/cms/content/local-wildlife-sites">http://www.tverc.org/cms/content/local-wildlife-sites</a> or BMERC in Bucks

https://www.bbowt.org.uk/wildlife/planning-advice

"Community and Parish Guide to Biodiversity" 2012, BBOWT, OCC, TVERC

"Biodiversity and Planning in Buckinghamshire March 2014" BBOWT, Bucks CC, BMERC, MKC, NE

MAGiC map for priority habitats and Ancient Woodland <u>https://magic.defra.gov.uk/home.htm</u>

### If you only take three things away from this talk

- Call for **biodiversity net gain**
- Know your local plan policies and use them to call for protections and enhancements
- Find your Local Wildlife Sites





# Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership (The "NEP")

#### Website: www.bucksmknep.co.uk

Chair: Chris M Williams <u>cmwilliams715@btinternet.com</u> Partnership Manager: Nicola Thomas <u>nicola.thomas@buckinghamshire.gov.uk</u> Comms, Projects and Funding Officer: Rhiannon Flemming rhiannon.flemming@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

### Who are we? What do we do?







### **Collective Voice - Planning**

Calling for emphasis on good practice for biodiversity and Green Infrastructure into Local Plan policy wording across Bucks and MK

The NEP has several strategies, visions and initiatives relating to GI and Biodiversity that we have been using to inform our asks for the content of Local Plans - consultation responses / discussions:

#### Biodiversity

#### **Action Plan**



Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Biodiversity Action Plan



#### Biodiversity Accounting





### Vision and Principles;

Green Infrastructure

### Mapping



Growth Arc







THE ENVIRONMENT IS OUR BUS

# **Biodiversity:** Action Plan





Forward to 2020

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Biodiversity Action Plan



#### Asks in Local Plans:

- Specific commitment to the BAP
- Policies to align with
  - the need to retain, restore, and, where possible, enhance priority habitats and biodiversity
  - the priority habitat creation and restoration targets
  - opportunities to protect, manage, and enhance the county's Biodiversity Opportunity Areas
- Require planning proposals to identify opportunities to retain, or enhance, ecological networks; and recognise the importance of protecting priority habitats and Local Wildlife Sites

Biodiversity of Bucks and MK

- Varied geology and topography
- Many habitats and species are of national / international importance; protected sites; importance of LWSs.
- Wildlife value and wider benefits to people and the economy

Challenges faced across Bucks & MK:

- Low % SSSIs; less BAP Priority habitat than average county; changes in land management; rivers straightened and disconnected from floodplain; habitat fragmentation; pollution; decline in pollinators; pests, diseases, climate change; development pressure.

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Action Plan:

- Priority Habitat targets 20% creation and restoration. Contribution to national targets. Nationally or locally rare habitats or species / in decline characteristic of area. Better land management beyond protected sites – ecological networks and wildlife corridors
- Focus priority habitat creation efforts in Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and priority water catchments as a basis for ecological networks— at the landscape-scale. BOAs = greatest opportunities for habitat creation.

# **Biodiversity:** Accounting

Ensuring every development results in a net gain for biodiversity



Impact on biodiversity – is measured;
Losses in biodiversity - are avoided;
always recognised and minimised;
Gains in biodiversity - are provided: on-site
wherever possible off-site as a last-resort
("mitigation hierarchy" followed)



Offsite compensation: biodiversity improvements can be directed to priority areas to help provide new benefits



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Benefits to, and from, biodiversity are maximised

#### **Asks in Local Plans:**

- Adherence to mitigation hierarchy (avoidance and on-site first)
- Commitment to measurable long-term net gains
- Forthcoming SPD with details
- Measure net gains as part of LP monitoring
   framework
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**Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership** 

# **Green Infrastructure**

Vision and Principles for the improvement of green infrastructure in Buckinghamshire

Healthy living

Community

THE ENVIRONMENT IS OUR BUSINESS

Air



Water





#### Green infrastructure – multiple benefits



Food



Habitat

"We collectively endorse a vision for Green Infrastructure in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes by 2030 that provides, connects, improves and protects our Green Infrastructure assets for their many benefits and into the long term". 18

# **Green Infrastructure** OPPORTUNITY ZONES MAP



Illustrative map of the NEP's Vision and Principles – which apply across the NEP area at all scales.

Data plus expertise = GI Opportunity Zones: large-scale areas of opportunity.

Interactive map and full explanation on the NEP website

#### Ask in Local Plans:

Endorse the Vision & Principles explicitly

Encourage - Districts and MK to take ownership for implementing it in their areas and to coordinate implementation across borders. (and check std response)







### **Environmental Opportunities Map**

A map based on expertise from LNPs across the Growth Arc for engagement and influencing and a basis for working up large-scale projects – to access possible funding

"Doubling Nature"

Lessons for Local Planning: importance of

- Collaboration
- Working Cross-Border
- Funding
- Early and strategic planning for nature



- 1. Rockingham Forest into John Clare Country
- 2. Nene Washes 3. Nene Valley
- Nene valley
   Great Fen
- 5. Wildlife corridor linking Great Fen and Ouse
- Washes 6. Ouse Washes
- Ouse washes
   East Cambridgeshire and Suffolk Fens
- 8. Arc Parkland Forest
- 9. Ouse Valley Corridor
- 10. Wildlife corridor linking Ouse Washes and Wicken Fen Vision
- 11. Wicken Fen Vision
- 12. Cambridge Green Spaces
- 13. Sywell Wood Area
- 14. South East Cambridgeshire Ancient Woodland Cluster
- 15. South of Daventry
- 16. Greensand Ridge into West Cambridge Hundreds
- 17. Gog Magog Hills
- 18. Bedford Green Arcs 19. Forest of Marston Vale
- 20. Waterway Park
- 21. Ivel Valley
- 22. Ousel Valley and Grand Union Canal Corridor
- 23. Milton Keynes Green Spaces
- 24. Whaddon Chase Freedom to Roam Parkland
- 25. Western Valleys and Cotswolds
- 26. Cherwell Valley
- 27. Bernwood Forest, Otmoor and River Ray Complex
- 28. The Chilterns
- 29. River Lea
- 30. Aylesbury Woodland Ring featuring Black
- Poplar Landscape 31. Upper Thames, Wytham and Cothill
- 32. River Thame and Cycleway Corridor
- 33. Vale of White Horse and North Wessex Downs
- 34. Burnham Beeches and Black Park
- 35. Coine Valley

### **Calls for Local Plans**



In line with these, the NEP has been calling for Local Plans to include:

- i) Biodiversity:
  - alignment with and support for the BAP; recognition of importance of priority habitats, BOAs, local wildlife sites, etc.
  - commitment to measurable net biodiversity gains into the long-term as a result of all development

#### ii) Green Infrastructure:

- early and strategic planning of green infrastructure in line with the NEP's GI
   Vision and Principles for improving GI across Bucks and MK
- to expand, enhance, protect and connect GI for multiple benefits and ensure it contributes to a broader connected network for wildlife and people.

#### iii) Explicit endorsement of the NEP's BAP and its GI Vision and Principles.

Plus:

Biodiversity Net Gain system;

Continued close working with Bucks Council (new Local Plan for whole of Bucks)



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# Neighbourhood Plans

## Annie Ottaway Senior Biodiversity & Planning Officer (Bucks) BBOWT

www.bbowt.org.uk

Protecting local wildlife



# **BBOWT's Role in Planning**

- Seek to influence Local Plans for the benefit of nature and wildlife;
- Aim to influence planning decisions to ensure positive outcomes for local wildlife;
- Work with partners to plan strategically for nature's recovery.
- Inspire and empower local communities to stand up for their local natural environment

https://www.bbowt.org.uk/wildlife/planning-advice



# What is a Neighbourhood Plan?

- 2011 Localism Act gives power to communities to shape development in their area via a Neighbourhood Plan
- Must conform to Local Plans and the National Planning Policy Framework





# How can it help wildlife?

## Identify the wildlife present in the area

Creating a map or list of what species or habitats the area has (or would like to have) and are important to the community is the first step in protecting it.



www.bbowt.org.uk



# How can it help wildlife?

## **Designate Local Green Spaces**

Protect valued green spaces as an asset for the community and protect areas of good habitat for wildlife from development.

Designations must comply with National Planning Policy:

The Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green space is:

- *a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;*
- b) demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
- c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.



# How can it help wildlife?

### **Guide development**

The plan can guide development to land of least value for wildlife and avoid developing sites with

high biodiversity.





**Protecting local wildlife** 





# How can it help Wildlife?

# Identify and protect local habitats and wildlife corridors

The plan can identify local corridors that wildlife are or could be using to travel through the landscape and protect

these routes.



www.bbowt.org.uk

#### **Protecting local wildlife**



# How can it help wildlife?

## Stipulate what development must achieve

- Retain trees and hedgerows
- Specify 25% tree canopy cover
- Use pollinator friendly planting
- Incorporate rain gardens
- Provision of a nature reserve
- Large buffers of any existing nature site
  - E.g. 50m next to ancient woodland
- Include bird/bat boxes and hedgehog holes
- Include drainage features such as swales and ponds
- Maintain a large buffers from water courses (at least 10m)
- Include wildflower seeding in the road verges
- A measurable 20% net gain in biodiversity



#### www.bbowt.org.uk



# How can it help wildlife?

# **Opportunities for Biodiversity Enhancement**

The plan can set out certain areas it would like enhanced for wildlife. For example Local Green Spaces or identified wildlife corridors.





# Advice on plan making

- Set up a Natural Environment Group within the Neighbourhood Planning team
- Include questions about the natural environment and wildlife when consulting the community
- Consult the local records centre
- Look beyond your neighbourhood nature doesn't have boundaries
- Encourage people to record wildlife sightings
- Engage land owners early on
- Look for sources of funding
- Look for local sources of expertise you may have an ecologist resident.





# Chesham Town Council A Case Study

# Cllr Jane MacBean

### Chair of Community, Assets & Environment Cttee

www.chesham.gov.uk www.bbowt.org.uk Serve One Another Protecting local wildlife



Chesham Town Council

Berkshire Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire



- Devolved Services tailored package, local control, local priorities, cost savings.
- Green Space Management timings, natural versus manicured, identifying new spaces.
- Managing Internal Change new attitudes, staff development, enhanced team, changing regimes, monetizing services.
- Partnership Working local knowledge & expertise, defining responsibilities, expert organisations, volunteer force, share learning.
- Resident Input communicate, collaborate & educate, increased resident knowledge and interest.
- Overcoming Issues plan, budget, flexibility, adaptability, prepare to compromise, Chesham Neighbourhood Plan.
- Meadows, Flowers & Trees real benefits, growing habitats, greater awareness.

www.chesham.gov.uk www.bbowt.org.uk Serve One Another Protecting local wildlife



### Chesham Town Council

Berkshire Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire





For further information / support you can email any questions to:-<u>jmacbean@chesham.gov.uk</u> Tel: 07812 177 794

www.chesham.gov.uk www.bbowt.org.uk Serve One Another Protecting local wildlife