

Biodiversity Duty Swanton Novers Parish Council

Some of you will be aware that the Environment Act 2021 places a duty on all public authorities to “conserve and enhance” the natural world. This is known as the ‘biodiversity duty.’ As a public authority, Swanton Novers Parish Council (SNPC) must:

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

‘Biodiversity’ is a contraction of ‘biological diversity’, which encompasses the variability and variety of life on Earth. Importantly, biodiversity includes all living things - not just wildlife. Although often overlooked, biodiversity provides a range of ecosystem services, contributing to the quality of our day-to-day lives. Biodiversity matters because it:

- Helps to purify water and air, reduces flooding, promotes nutrient cycling and soil formation, decomposes wastes and regulates the climate. These indispensable ‘life support’ benefits have been estimated to be worth billions of pounds each year.
- Contact with nature can improve learning performance in children, enhance emotional development, be an effective treatment for depression and reduce stress levels.
- Biodiversity has been a source of enjoyment, inspiration and spiritual nourishment for millennia.
- Biodiversity has intrinsic value, and many people argue that all species have the right to exist.

Earlier this year SNPC had to complete our first consideration of what action to take for biodiversity, which was a deadline set for all public authorities. Essentially, this simply involved discussing the duty and a way forward to produce a more detailed long-term action plan. At our last parish council meeting on Monday 18 March 2024, we took the first concrete step forward where the following three proposals were agreed, and we wanted to communicate these to our fellow parishioners.

1. We agreed to set up a village working group to develop the parish long-term biodiversity action plan. It is important that SNPC’s action plan is developed collaboratively with other interested bodies and people in and around the village, therefore, membership will be made up of representatives from SNPC, the Village Hall, the Church Parochial Parish Council, the Community Land Trust and, of course, anyone from the village who is interested in contributing is also welcome to join. Their brief is to develop proposals to enhance biodiversity and to meet the requirements that fall within the public duty. The plan would be developed, and proposals consulted upon with parishioners, before being agreed by SNPC in early 2025.
2. Maintenance of the Old School Village Green hedgerow and planting with native mixed-hedge species to ‘fill-in’ the gaps. The saplings to be provided by the Woodland Trust and protected from deer herbivory. The Old school Village Green is a protected registered Village Green, it is the small green area with three oak trees adjacent to the public footpath that runs from St Giles Road to Church Lane.
3. That we trial on the Old School Village Green and on the grass verges on St Giles Road letting the grass and wildflowers (if any) grow and go to seed. This will involve not mowing until September, which is an initiative that builds on ‘No-mow May’ and follows the most recent biodiversity best practice to extend the period to the autumn. The trial will then be reviewed at the end of the year with the residents as to impact and continuance. This initiative is one that relies on the good will of residents not to mow to see what will grow naturally to aid biodiversity and wildlife refuge. The Parish Council is clear that we cannot, and do not wish to, compel anyone not to mow but we hope that most residents, if not all, will play a part.

If anyone has any questions or would like to volunteer to be part of the biodiversity working group, then please do get in touch.

Dr Ian Watson, Councillor, SNPC
Mrs Virginia Riseborough, SNPC Vice-chair
March 2024