

Ardleigh Parish Council

Biodiversity Duty and Policy

Background

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. Public authorities must now consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England.¹ 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.

Biodiversity refers to the variety of life on earth. Biodiversity is everywhere around us.

The Government requires all public authorities to complete their first consideration of what action to take for biodiversity by 01.01.24. Policies and objectives must be agreed as soon as possible after this date.

To comply with the guidance, the Parish Council could, as a minimum:

- Have biodiversity as an agenda item for Parish Council meetings
- Note what action in respect of biodiversity is already taking place
- Agree further actions.

Such steps may include:

- Review policies from Tendring District Council and Essex County Council and seek support from them
- Contact local groups working with nature conservation including Ardleigh Practical Actions for Climate and Environment (APACE)
- Gather expert advice on possible actions in support of biodiversity
- Draft an action plan for the Parish Council as well as support for actions of other local bodies.

The Local Area

Ardleigh Parish is a largely rural area, surrounding a central village and outlying hamlets, with a wide array of natural and biodiverse areas, including: ancient woodlands and hedgerows, ditches, farmland, meadows, reservoir and Salary Brook. (See Neighbourhood Plan Landscape and Environment 5.31 – 5.56).

Parish Council responsibilities

The Parish Council owns and manages Ardleigh Cemetery, Colchester Road Play area. It is Sole Trustee of Ardleigh Village Hall and Ardleigh Recreation Ground.

The Council manages /maintain some other grassed areas, verges (on behalf of Essex County Council) Churchyard and Millennium Green (in partnership with Millennium Green Trust).

¹ As defined in 'Biodiversity 2020: a strategy of England's wildlife and ecosystems' by DEFRA

The Council owns and manages assets on most of these sites listed in the asset register such as benches, street furniture and lighting and play and exercise equipment.

The Council contracts third parties to do much of the maintenance work on our behalf. Contracts are competitively tendered and all applicants are asked to include a statement on biodiversity as part of the tender process.

The Parish Council is also responsible for its emerging Neighbourhood Plan.

What the Parish Council will do:

- Consider the impact on biodiversity in the decisions made through the Parish Council, especially when commenting on planning applications.
- Reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides used on Parish Council owned land
- Review how it manages the land it is responsible for. 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
 - The Parish Council will consider reducing the number of cuts in particular areas and allowing the grasses to grow and be swathed in September.
- Ardleigh Parish Council is responsible for its emerging Neighbourhood Plan and will ensure that biodiversity is discussed and added to the plan as necessary.
- Where appropriate within the contracts the Parish Council will:
 - Ensure that there is a margin of uncut grass around the hedges to allow longer grasses to grow
 - Allow fallen tree branches to remain, if safe, to allow invertebrates to habitat
 - Encourage biodiversity around areas that can be wilded, either to grow as long grass and flowers, or to be formally managed as a wildflower area.
- Hedge cutting will take place outside of the bird nesting season. (Beginning of March to end August unless the hedge constitutes a health and safety issue, for example: a hedge overhanging a public footpath which might force pedestrians into the road; a roadside hedge which restricts visibility of road users.
- The Parish Council will consider purchasing and install bird boxes in places such as the Ardleigh Recreation Ground and Millennium Green and Village Hall garden area.
- The Parish Council will look to promote biodiversity via the Parish Council website and other communications with the community.
- The Parish Council will support activities in the community that encourage local action on climate and the environment including names Councillor liaison with APACE.