

AGENDA ITEM 11

STNDING ORDER 15 QUESTION

Councillor Bob Wright has asked the Leader of the Council:

The loss of insects has far-reaching consequences for entire ecosystems. Insects provide a food source for many birds, amphibians, bats and reptiles, while plants rely on insects for pollination.

- What is being done to restore suitable habitats?
- What is being done to increase suitable habitats?
- How is this measured?

Research has identified that actions such as wildlife-friendly farming and gardening can have a positive impact on pollinators in both towns and the countryside.

- What is the council doing to promote wildlife friendly actions?
- What beneficial plants and weeds are being planted in the borough and where?

Common species are winning out at the expense of rarer ones, with an overall picture of biodiversity being lost.

- What is being done to balance the biodiversity?

The council is responsible for the application of harmful substances to control plants such as around tree roots

- How does it justify this use when these plants are part of our biodiversity?
- This application appears to be used to make it easy for grass cutting, is this the case?

The Leader of the Council has responded:

The local authority has a number of statutory duties and policy priorities related to nature conservation which go beyond protection of wildlife to creation and conservation of wildlife habitats. Notable duties fall under the NERC (Natural Environment and Rural Communities) Act 2006, CROW (Countryside and Rights of Way) Act 2000 and NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework, 2019).

As such we work across a number of fronts:

Land management: SBC manage or have agreements in place for third parties to do so including Parishes and Trusts, a number of nature reserves notable for their flora and associated fauna at: Sevenfields Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Stanton Park LNR, Coate Water (Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI, LNR) and Wildlife Sites notably at Barbury Castle, Mouldon Hill, Moredon Meadows and Lydiard Park,

Support for partner organisations: SBC continue to work closely with partner organisations including the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust and the Forestry Commission. Partners not only manage reserves within Swindon but importantly have active volunteer and community engagement and outreach programmes.

Examples:

- Kingsfarm (WS): joint owned by SBC and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and managed in partnership including Wroughton Parish Council
- Rivermead (WS): SBC owned site managed by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust with active volunteer group.
- Stratton Woods and Warneage Woods: Woodland Trust owned and managed with support over the years.

Support for local community groups and volunteers: SBC, particularly via GWCF, work with a number of nature focussed community groups either directly or indirectly via partner organisations. Examples: groups at Highworth, Hreod Burna, Rivermead, Chiseldon, Hagbourne

Developing and supporting landscape initiatives:

- The Great Western Community Forest programme continues to increase woodland and tree cover across Swindon. Woodland schemes include use of insect pollinated trees and shrubs, often alongside development of other wildlife habitats. Over 1000 ha of woodland have been planted across the GWCF since its inception in the early 1990s. A good example is at Shaw Forest Park, where woodland sits within a wider mosaic of grassland, wetland, ephemeral and scrub habitats.
GWCF are currently working with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to develop a programme to bring extensive areas of meadowland in Swindon into active management to increase floral diversity.
- SBC support the work of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. One initiative within the AONB is the development of 'farmer clusters'. The clusters involve collaborative working between a group of farms to bring about environmental improvements. Farmers to the south of Swindon have been working together on grassland restoration schemes with the aim to link flower rich areas together

Planning policy and development management: Planning policies relating to the natural environment are set out in Swindon's Local Plan. Related policies refer to statutory protection of species, sites and habitats set out in a number of 'evidence base' documents including the adopted Nature Conservation Development Control Guidance Note, Swindon's Green Infrastructure Strategy, Swindon's Urban Landscape-scale Conservation Framework alongside the Landscape Character – A Landscape-scale Framework for Conservation in Wiltshire and Swindon (July 2013). Specifically planning policy requires not only protection of key sites for nature but a requirement for a net gain for biodiversity: often manifest in creation of semi-natural habitats including those within sustainable urban drainage systems, and choice of wildlife friendly plant species in landscape schemes.

Planning Delivery in practice- Green Infrastructure delivery is a key component in development management, particularly to balance Swindon's Major Expansion Areas. The New Eastern Villages for instance has been master planned and supported by Special Planning Documents that are designed to ensure both quantity and quality of biodiverse open space. The planning process assesses the baseline ecology and proposed enhancements to meet our commitments for biodiversity gain.

Monitoring: as part of our local planning authority functions, SBC help fund the work of the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Record Centre (WSBRC). The WSBRC collate, maintain an up-to-date database and distribute species data, including records of notable plant species. The WSBRC benefits from the expertise and work of the volunteer county recorder network for Wiltshire (including Swindon). The county recorders are specialists in their chosen flora or fauna which cover and for flowering plants, and various insect taxa: bees, beetles, butterflies, dragonflies, moths, sawflies.

The Wildlife Sites (WS) programme, led by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust works with local authorities and other partners to assess and monitor WS across the county. There are approximately 90 WS in Swindon in both public and private ownership, many of which are noted for their flora and associated fauna.