Witham Town Council: Biodiversity Policy

Witham Town Council acknowledges its duty under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, section 40, to consider the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out its functions.

Introduction

Witham Town Council's Environmental Policy reflects that it is committed to reducing its environmental impact and creating a sustainable community for residents and future generations. The Council acknowledges and supports climate emergency declarations have been made by Essex County Council and Braintree District Council to become carbon neutral by 2030.

Objectives

Biodiversity denotes every living organism found in an ecosystem or habitat and is the variety of life on earth. The object of this policy is to provide clear objectives to ensure that Witham Town Council and its committees actively work towards conserving and enhancing the biodiversity of Witham and takes into account the impact on biodiversity when delivering its services, carrying out its duties and when considering all strategic decisions.

The Town Council own, manage, and maintain several open spaces which include, James Cooke Wood, Whetmead Nature Reserve, the Closed Churchyard, and the River Walk as well as two allotment sites. These provide opportunities for natural habitats which the Council is committed to protecting through its Biodiversity and Environmental Policies.

Specific Biodiversity Actions

The Council will

- when commenting on planning applications, support designs which benefit biodiversity and consider whether the development would mean a loss of important habitats. Witham has two conservation areas and the Town Council monitors and reports contraventions to the Planning Authority as they occur.
- monitor the requirement for a 10% biodiversity net gain on all new relevant planning applications.
- look to include policies in support of biodiversity within the Neighbourhood Plan.
- continue to exclude the use of all pesticides on Council managed open spaces.
- discourage the use of pesticides on Witham's allotment sites.
- conduct all, non-urgent, hedge cutting and tree management outside of the bird nesting season.
- leave, where appropriate and safe to do so, fallen trees and deadwood in the River Brain and Blackwater to provide habitats for fish and river-born invertebrates.
- leave deadwood, where it is safe to do so, in our open spaces to provide habitat for beetles, woodlice and other insects.

- work with experts to conduct surveys to monitor the wildlife and habitats on our Open Spaces, including, but not limited to, glow worms, water voles and bats, to better understand the impact of active management plans and highlight where improvements can be made to support different species.
- actively look to increase the biodiversity within its open spaces through land management practices and habitat creation.
- promote biodiversity via the town's social media, website and Voice magazine.
- work with local environmental voluntary groups and organisations such as Witham Tree Group.
- take into account Essex County Council's Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- seek expert advice on possible actions in support of biodiversity such as Essex Wildlife Trust and the Forestry Commission.

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