

CABINET
15 OCTOBER 2015**DESIGNATION OF WORCESTERSHIRE AS A POLLINATOR-FRIENDLY COUNTY**

Relevant Cabinet Member

Mr A N Blagg

Relevant Officer

Director of Business, Environment and Community

Recommendation

- 1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment recommends that Cabinet accepts the principles behind the Notice of Motion and resolves to give effect to it by:**
 - (a) endorsing the current work being undertaken to ensure Worcestershire is a pollinator-friendly county: and**
 - (b) endorsing the actions proposed in paragraphs 20-31 to increase pollinator-friendly habitat.**

Background

2. The Constitution provides that if a motion relates to an executive function, it will be referred to the Cabinet for determination. The following motion was duly moved and seconded at Council on 9 July 2015 and stood referred to the Cabinet. Mr Blagg and Mr Hardman (as mover and seconder) are members of the Cabinet. Mrs Eyre (the third signatory of the Notice of Motion) has been invited to the meeting.
3. Notice of Motion standing in the names of Mr A N Blagg, Mr A I Hardman and Mrs E A Eyre:

“This Council wishes to designate Worcestershire as a Pollinator Friendly County and to promote protection of pollinators and their habitats. All types of pollinators including bees are declining in number throughout the United Kingdom including Worcestershire. They are vital to the food supply of the nation and are particularly important in a county with a large agricultural and horticultural industry such as ours where food including fruit, grains and animal feeds are grown. This will include looking to the management of County Council owned land including roadside verges and spreading information on biodiversity to help residents and businesses play their part in increasing local habitats, promoting bee keeping and planting pollinator friendly plants.

Pollinators include various species of bees, butterflies, moths, beetles and hoverflies. The economic value of honey bees and bumble bees alone as pollinators

of commercially grown insect pollinated crops in the UK has been estimated at over £200 million per year.

Pollinators have been affected by a number of issues including a decline in habitat, caused by the intensification of land use, habitat loss, pests, invasive species, climate change and the inappropriate use of agro-chemicals. The bee population in particular has declined significantly since the 1950's, with three native bumble bee species becoming extinct and another eight suffering serious contractions in their range.

We call upon all Council Members and Officers to make sure pollinator habitats are not destroyed and to help increase them wherever possible”.

4. This report outlines the importance of pollinators to the national economy and environment and their importance to Worcestershire. It also describes actions which the Council is currently undertaking with regard to pollinators and proposes further activities.

5. In addition, the report outlines actions that other partners are currently undertaking and work across the county to promote pollinator habitat through the Worcestershire Local Nature Partnership.

Pollinators and their Importance

6. It is estimated that the value of pollinators to the English economy is in excess of £200m per year, largely derived from their role in the agricultural food-chain, pollinating a variety of crops including soft and orchard fruits, vegetables and salad crops. Worcestershire's landscape is especially notable in England for its traditional orchard habitat and some apple varieties are 90% dependent on insect pollination for fruit set. Sensitively managed orchards can provide an important food source and refuge for many insect species, acting as a pollination reservoir for surrounding farmland.

7. Pollinators are a diverse group of over 1,500 species of bumble bees, solitary bees, moths, butterflies, flies and hoverflies. Also included are honey bees which are kept both commercially and domestically for honey and associated products. In Worcestershire there are records of 165 species of wild bees, of which 46 are classified as rare and notable. However, the decline in number and diversity of wild pollinator species requires many Worcestershire farming businesses to import hives of commercially bred bees to achieve the necessary level of pollination for agricultural crop production.

8. The number and diversity of pollinators has been in decline for many years as a result of a number of challenges including:

- a) Loss of habitat - in particular traditional orchards (approx. 85% loss across England since 1940s, with Worcestershire containing approx. 12% of remainder) and wild flower meadows (approx. 97% loss across England since 1940s, with Worcestershire containing approx. 20% of remainder)
- b) Pests and diseases, with the increasing need to import bee colonies posing a potential biosecurity risk to native pollinators
- c) Competition from non-native and invasive species

- d) Climate change, which is causing a shift in the distribution of some species
- e) Use of some pesticides, with studies showing that even non-lethal pesticides can disrupt foraging ability and that the effects of exposure to more than one non-lethal pesticide in combination can be cumulative.

9. In response to these pressures the former Coalition Government published 'The National Pollinator Strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England' (November 2014) with the following aims:

- a) Supporting pollinators on farmland
- b) Supporting pollinators across towns, cities and the countryside
- c) Enhancing the response to pest and disease risks
- d) Raising awareness of what pollinators need to survive and thrive
- e) Improving evidence on the status of pollinators and the services they provide.

10. The strategy was aimed at a wide audience including local authorities, environmental organisations, businesses and land owners, and it encourages different organisations to work in partnership to achieve its aims.

11. The County Council is taking the lead in developing pollinator friendly working practices and policies, but there are many opportunities to extend this approach through existing partnerships with other organisations. We will be working with the Worcestershire Local Nature Partnership to extend this approach beyond the County Council. The Worcestershire Local Nature Partnership has a diverse membership including county and district councils, Natural England, Environment Agency, Historic England, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and representatives from the National Farmers Union and Country Land and Business Association. Many members are already contributing to the development of pollinator projects or are interested in contributing.

Current Actions

12. A number of different work streams in the Business, Environment and Community Directorate support the aims of the National Pollinator Strategy.

- **Roadside Verges**

13. There are 43 designated Roadside Verge Nature Reserves across the county. These are designated for their wild flower interest based on a series of criteria which protect the most diverse habitat. These verges are mown annually to protect and enhance the habitat, which supports a range of pollinators.

14. Safety is paramount in the management of road verges, for both pedestrians and motorists, and the majority of roadside verges are cut twice a year to a width of one metre from the edge of the highway, and to allow for visibility splays.

15. Where verges are wider than this safety requirement, and conditions allow, they are not mown, resulting in an increasingly diverse habitat which includes wild flowers, scrub and woody species, which are of interest to a range of pollinators over a long season.

- **Traditional Orchards**

16. Working in partnership with Worcestershire Biological Records Centre and funded by Natural England, a series of projects have delivered enhanced management of traditional orchards which provide nectar opportunities for pollinators, particularly early in the spring. Over 100 hectares of traditional orchard have been managed and 1000 new fruit trees planted.

- **Land Management**

17. Bee hives and bee hotels have been installed at Worcester Woods Country Park.

18. Management of the Hartlebury Common Site of Specific Scientific Interest is designed to protect the habitat of rare solitary bee habitat and the species itself.

19. Herbicide use on highways is restricted to Glyphosate-based compounds which have no known negative impacts on pollinators or their habitat and which leave no residues within the environment.

Proposals for Future Actions

- **Land Management**

20. Within the current highways maintenance contract, funding is available for a small increase in the number of Roadside Verge Nature Reserves. A number of potential new sites have been suggested by community groups and individuals and these are currently being monitored to ensure that they meet criteria.

21. Sites in the Countryside Management portfolio are currently managed to promote nature conservation through habitat management which is of benefit to a wide range of pollinators. Opportunities to expand this positive management to other sites in the County Council's ownership will be explored, including the former landfill sites, through appropriate changes to the land management regimes.

22. Opportunities for further bee hives and bee hotels on Countryside Sites are being sought, including Waseley Hills Country Park.

23. A trial project to increase pollinator habitat on suitable roadside verges and adjacent land is being included within a County Council-led Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership grant application for the Vale of Evesham. The Vale of Evesham scheme will be a national flagship for the county, being developed as a collaborative initiative between the Worcestershire Local Nature Partnership and Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership, and will be submitted in 2016.

- **Education**

24. A grant has been submitted to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to fund a project promoting the management of school grounds for pollinators. Subject to the grant application being successful, a competition will select winning schools to receive expertise and funding to improve their school grounds for pollinators. It is proposed that this is a rolling project commencing in the

south of the county, to be expanded if successful (subject to resources). Best practice guides will be developed to promote the work to all schools in the county.

- **Worcestershire Local Nature Partnership**

25. A partnership approach towards achieving the goal of Worcestershire becoming a pollinator-friendly county is being promoted through the Worcestershire Local Nature Partnership.

26. At the September meeting of the Worcestershire Local Nature Partnership it was agreed that a "Pollinator Pledge" would be developed for members to raise awareness of existing activity, develop new projects, and share good practice to promote change to ensure beneficial practices for pollinators. The Local Nature Partnership will take on the responsibility for monitoring the pledge and ensuring its delivery through partnership projects.

27. Two examples of emerging projects from Local Nature Partnership members are the University of Worcester investigating the management of their estate and potential creation of pollinator corridors. A successful funding application has also been submitted by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust to support landowners in improving pollinator habitats in the Bow Brook and Shrawley Brook areas.

- **Planning**

28. The Worcestershire Green Infrastructure Partnership, which is led by County Council, has been working with County and Local Planning Authorities to influence local planning policy and developments to ensure that green infrastructure is delivered as part of the development, with community, economic and environmental benefits. Green infrastructure policies are now included in the adopted and emerging local plans which will be of benefit to pollinators through the extension, creation or protection of habitat.

29. The Green Infrastructure Partnership will continue to work with developers to promote this approach and ensure that suitable habitat is created and long-term maintenance proposals are appropriate. The Partnership will also explore short-term habitat creation opportunities on development land with owners and developers. This approach has been successfully used to create short-term pollinator habitat and improve the appearance of unmanaged land, without having a negative impact on the ability to bring proposals forward or a grant of planning permission.

30. The emerging Minerals Local Plan includes policy and proposals for the restoration of minerals sites, informed by Green Infrastructure opportunities to ensure that restoration provides wider natural environment and community benefits. This approach will be of benefit to pollinators through habitat creation, restoration and connectivity.

31. A remaining challenge is to capture the range of current and proposed activity and sign-post interested parties to information and best practice and promote this approach to our communities. The Local Nature Partnership web pages will provide an interim information resource, listing projects as they develop and providing information on how communities can be involved. Information and best practice will also be shared with the volunteer networks hosted by the various Local Nature

Partnership members, many of whom assist with land management and monitoring. New projects and proposals will also be welcomed from the community which, where practicable, will enable us to develop further and promote good practice.

Financial Implications

32. The majority of the actions outlined above can be achieved through existing resources and changes to working practices. The exceptions to this are the schools work and the road verge management proposals in the Vale of Evesham project for which external grant funding is being sought.

Equality and Diversity Implications

33. An Equality Relevance Screening has been completed in respect of these recommendations. The screening did not identify any potential Equality considerations requiring further consideration during implementation.

Privacy Impact Assessment

34. This report has no impact on privacy issues.

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Business, Environment and Community) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Agenda papers for the meeting of County Council held on 9 July 2015, available on the Council's website at: <http://worcestershire.moderngov.co.uk/...>