

Bee/Pollinator Policy & Action Plan

**PLEASE EXCUSE
THE WEEDS
WE ARE FEEDING
THE BEES!**

By allowing the grass and natural native vegetation to grow in this area we are increasing pollinator habitat for insects and wildlife



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1. Forward

Gedling Borough Council's Bee/Pollinator Policy and Action Plan is about changes both the Council and all of us can make, to protect the habitats and food sources used by these vital insects which are so important for producing the food we eat and for pollinating the plants that make up the diverse habitats of the Boroughs gardens, parks, green spaces and countryside.

We've already started to make a difference to how we manage our landscape, the Borough's Parks and Green Spaces, but there's no doubt that much still needs to be done by both individuals and communities to ensure our pollinators not only survive but thrive when there are so many threats to their existence.



Portfolio Holder for Climate
Change and Natural Habitat
Cllr Viv McCrossen

2. Introduction

This document is Gedling Borough Council's Pollinator Policy and Action Plan. It outlines and supports work being undertaken to protect bees as pollinators in the Borough by both our staff and our residents.

Its purpose is to encourage residents of the Borough to mobilise. Businesses, schools, gardeners, farmers, the old and the young - everybody who lives here - to act to improve the habitat and the food sources of bees and to reverse their continuing decline.

This Action Plan sets out what Gedling Borough Council is doing to help these insects vital to our environment, food and economy. It is written to:

- Make the council a community leader in action for pollinators, showing the way in its own operations and land management, and by supporting others to do the same.
- Ensure that pollinators' needs are always considered throughout the Council's work and services.
- Put the conservation of pollinators and their habitats at the heart of the council's land management and planning.
- Make the Council a significant contributor to the recovery of pollinator populations, supporting both biodiversity and the county's food producers.

Gedling Borough Council's Pollinator Action Plan commits the Council to:

- Manage the land it owns to help control and influence the way pollinators' habitat and forage.
- Work with partners across the Borough to better protect pollinators and improve the habitats on which they rely.
- Raise awareness of the importance of pollinators and the need to safeguard these vital insects, mobilising residents to consider taking their own action within communities, workplaces, schools, and homes.
- Monitor and evaluate its action for pollinators to understand the impact of our efforts to better direct action and resources to where they are most needed.

3. What are pollinators?

Pollinators are essential to our environment, our food production, and our lives. They are so-called because they carry the reproductive pollen grains from flower to flower, enabling fertilisation for seeds, nuts and fruit to be produced. Through pollination, new generations of plants grow, which in turn support wild habitats and other wildlife. Without pollination, most wild and cultivated plants, from trees to strawberries, could not reproduce.

They are central to fruit and crop production – and serve crops like oil seed rape, clovers and other nitrogen fixing plants, important for livestock grazing and wildflowers.

They add to the diversity of plant species, habitats and wildlife in the Borough as well as its natural beauty, making it a better place to live, to enjoy and to visit. Losing our pollinators would be a major ecological and economic disaster.

Many different insect groups are excellent pollinators. The best known of them are bees, including bumblebees, solitary bees and the honeybee. But other insects are equally vital for pollination including wasps, hoverflies, moths and butterflies.

Even some beetles, mosquitoes and ants have a pollinating role. Many plants have evolved to offer nectar to attract insects. Whilst insects are feeding on a flower's nectar or collecting pollen to feed to their young, pollen grains stick to the insects' bodies and transfer to the reproductive organs of the next flower they visit.



4. What's causing the loss?

The loss of pollinators is a direct threat to our ability to feed ourselves. Without bees, hoverflies and other insects visiting flowers there would be no fruit, coffee, nuts, olives, vegetables and fewer flowers in our gardens or countryside.

Despite their importance, pollinators are in serious decline as a result of habitat loss, pesticides and climate change. The Bumblebee Conservation Trust reports that two species of bumblebees went extinct in the past 80 years, with eight species, a third of those remaining, now endangered. Butterfly Conservation reports similar concerns, with over three-quarters of our butterfly species having declined since 1976¹ and two-thirds of our common and widespread moths declined between 1968 and 2007².

In 2022, the citizen science survey Bugs Matter³ reported a decline in flying insects by 59% between 2004 and 2021. These figures indicate a rapidly declining trend in insect abundance nationwide, consistent with research that has shown declining trends globally.

1 <https://butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/soukb-2015.pdf>

2 <https://butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/202103/StateofMothsReport2021.pdf>

3 Bugs Matter (kentwildlifetrust.org.uk)

The main threats to pollinators are habitat loss, climate change, pesticides, disease, and invasive species.

5. Habitat Loss

Changes in our land use, including insensitive urban development and intensive farming, have resulted in habitat loss and fragmentation, the most significant cause of pollinator decline.

Pollinators need flowers to forage and places to shelter, nest and overwinter, within vegetation, hedgerows, and soil. But since the Second World War, we have lost 97% of our wildflower meadows because of modern farming practices and urban development. Where wildflower-rich habitats do still exist, these are often small, isolated areas separated by land uses hostile to pollinators, making it difficult for insects to move around our landscapes.

6. Climate Change

By disrupting seasonal patterns and flowering periods of plants, climate change is impacting pollinators. It affects the timing of flowering plants that they rely on for food and disrupts nesting behaviours and emergence after winter. It is also thought that a warming climate could restrict or alter the range of pollinators.

7. Pesticides

The increased use of pesticides has adversely impacted pollinators and the plants on which they depend. Neonicotinoid pesticides are particularly harmful to bees, affecting their central nervous system, and consequently are now under a general ban across the European Union. Furthermore, some routinely used herbicides, have also been shown to affect pollinators and their use, of course, reduces the availability of food plants throughout the year.



8. Diseases and Invasive Species

Evidence suggests that some honeybee diseases can spread to our wild bumblebees. A further threat is invasive species such as the Asian hornet, which if allowed to take hold could devastate our native bee populations.

Pollinators have been in serious decline for many years and a loud and clear message is coming from scientists, wildlife organisations that they need help and quickly otherwise all of us, plants, pollinators and people, face challenges with our food sources.

9. What Do Pollinators Need - Key Findings

Food

Pollinators need food which for them is nectar and pollen foraged from a variety of flowering plants.

Shelter

They also need to be able to shelter, nest and overwinter in diverse habitats such as hedgerows, scrub and tall grass, burrows and holes in tree trunks. Many have different needs again in their larval (young) stages. Honeybees have their shelter (hives) provided but they still have problems in common with other pollinators.



Areas to Forage

Foraging grounds for all pollinators have been steadily eroded. All pollinators need flowering, semi-natural habitats like wildflower meadows, hedgerows and woodland edges. They need agricultural landscapes which have unimproved grassland, hay meadows, clover-rich grassland, orchards and arable crops. In Nottinghamshire many of these are declining and are in short supply. Large fields of wind pollinated crops, like wheat, do not support pollinating insects.

Habitats

It's not only the countryside where pollinators' needs can be better met. They can find food and shelter in gardens, parks, roadside verges and any other green space area. It's quite easy to provide for pollinators by making sure they have the right plants. They include common knapweed in wildflower meadows, red clover in pasture, hawthorn and bramble in hedgerows and woodland, and cosmos in bedding areas.

10. Why an Action Plan?

Environmental groups such as Friends of the Earth and the various Wildlife Trust Conservation groups say that a pollinator action plan like Gedling Borough's Plan can:

- ensure pollinators' needs are taken into account across a local authority's boundary;
- raise the awareness of pollinators' needs across all of a local authority's staff, contracts and networks;
- do the same in local communities through its staff and elected members who represent those communities;
- help to identify previously unrecognised ways to help pollinators;
- ensure the wellbeing of pollinators as a principal consideration in land management;
- help pollinator populations to recover to the benefit of farming and food production;

11. Corporate Context

Sustainable Environment - To promote a sustainable environment. Improving Biodiversity across the Borough.

Healthy Lifestyles - To promote the health and wellbeing of our residents.

Provide an Attractive and Sustainable Local Environment - That Local People Can Enjoy.

Support Physically Active Lifestyles - Develop and implement a plan to raise awareness of and maximise usage of our local parks and open spaces, which includes: 'Allotments and Community Gardens'.

Reduce Levels of Loneliness and Isolation. - Directly support local groups such as the Community Growing Spaces and Allotment Associations to help tackle loneliness and isolation

12. Review of Actions to-date in Gedling Borough

Background

Bee Pollinator Actions Since January 2021.

Establishing wildflower meadows on un-used areas of parks and public greenspace

In Summer 2021 Gedling Borough Council PASC Services started to introduce changes to its Parks and Green Spaces maintenance regime. It carried out an audit of its open spaces and identified areas within its parks and green spaces that could be set aside as open grassland wildflower habitats and areas for tree planting to provide much needed habitat for pollinators. These include Gedling Country Park, Arnot Hill Park, Burton Road Jubilee Park, Digby Park, The Hobbucks, Breck Hill Park, Lambley Lane, Willow Park and Arno Vale Park. The total area now set aside for wildflower meadow is areas 5.5 acres and growing each year.

The Service additionally reduced its cutting regime in these areas to one per annum, to provide greater gains for pollinators.

Each year (running April to May and September to October) it retains forage for pollinators free of cutting for the optimum flowering and feeding period. Over time, this approach is creating an extensive network of habitat mosaics, which are managed to optimise the range of habitats provided for pollinators across our open spaces network.

Planting pollinator-friendly plants as part of amenity planting in parks, gardens and green spaces

Further planting of pollinators at our Country Parks, Green Flag Parks and Recreation Grounds – species-rich grassland and trees for the benefit of pollinators have been included in landscaping. For examples at Gedling Country Park, Digby Park, Arno Vale and Thackeray's Recreation Grounds.

Planting trees for bees – blossom producing spring flowering trees such as apple, cherry, hawthorn, blackthorn, willow

Tree planting which includes sheltering and overwintering habitat and increasing the number of flowering, pollen rich plants.

The Council's country parks are managed for the benefit of biodiversity, and pollinators are an integral part of this activity with open grassland areas managed to maintain flowering plants and grasses. The aim being to create greater diversity and optimum soil conditions. At Gedling Country Park the habitat is specifically managed for the benefit of Dingy Skipper Butterflies, providing foraging and nesting opportunities.



Stopping the use of insecticides on local authority land

In January 2021 the Council stopped the use of neonicotinoids and glyphosates across all public access land that it manages in a proactive effort to reverse the destruction of the bees and pollinators and protect human health. The arising action plan enshrined this resolve and confirmed no use of the damaging Neonicotinoid or glyphosate weedkillers.

At the time members wrote to the Environment Secretary and Gedling Borough's local Members of Parliament, condemning the UK Government's recent authorisation in England of the use of a pesticide containing the neonicotinoid thiamethoxam, despite an EU-wide ban on its outdoor use and an explicit Government pledge to keep the restrictions. They called on the UK Government to fund proper research into the hazards of glyphosates on human and nature's health.

The Council's PASC Services department have also been trialling alternatives to herbicide use, however, no viable, effective, affordable and environmentally friendly alternatives have yet been found. Work continues on this and various opportunities to further explore pesticide use reduction and trial alternatives.

Working with local schools and community groups – Bee Friendly opportunities have been developed, focussing on the range of actions that could be taken at the local level by such.

Raising awareness and mobilising local community groups – 4,000 plus trees have been planted since 2001, many have been orchards in our Country Parks and school grounds.

Working with Nottinghamshire County Council to manage road verges for spring and late summer flowers

Our partner Highways authority has also introduced a 'No Mow May' campaign in 2023 and delays its end of season cuts to maintain flowering plants and grasses for as long as practically reasonable.

Protecting pollinator habitats via the planning process and encouraging all new developments to provide for pollinators



Many of Gedling Borough's richest wildflower grasslands have been identified, as sites of local importance for nature and biodiversity. These sites are protected through policies in the Council's Local Development Plan. The local development plan also contains policies to protect areas rich in biodiversity within the wider countryside from inappropriate development and identifies green networks within major settlements.

Continued biodiverse habitat surveying will assist with both the identification of and improvement of areas of existing species rich wildflower grassland under recent Biodiversity Net Gain and offsetting, planning policy changes. Such ecological surveys will help in the protection, enhancing, creation and mapping of these beneficial habitats to ensure that they thrive and grow.

All new developments in the future will additionally have to evidence Biodiversity net gain (BNG) which is a way of creating and improving natural habitats. BNG makes sure a new development has a measurably positive impact ('net gain') on biodiversity, compared to what was there before development. This is now mandatory from 12 February 2024 and part of Gedling Boroughs planning policy.

The Bee Friendly Pollinator Action Plan

OBJECTIVE 1

For Gedling Borough Council to manage the land it owns, controls and influences, in a way which benefits pollinators' habitat and forage

The Council will:

- Continue to review its land management practices and put in place, where it can, revised grass-cutting and maintenance regimes and apply pollinator-friendly planting. This applies to the country parks, cemeteries grounds, recreation grounds and our green spaces.
- Introduce an outright ban to ensure that neonicotinoids are never used on Council owned or managed land.
- Continue to lobby against any reintroduction or emergency use of neonicotinoids.
- Introduce an outright ban on the use of glyphosate across land owned or managed by the Council and review new alternative methodologies as they become available.
- Identify ways to create corridors for wildlife throughout the landscape within and adjacent to the Council's estate.
- Look for opportunities to 'green' its land assets and buildings with pollinator friendly planting and such things as bee hotels.
- Ensure the needs of pollinators are recognised across the range of Council services and functions and are considered within all strategies and policies which may impact on, or present opportunities for, pollinators.
- Develop approaches within the Council's planning services that will help to protect pollinator habitats.
- Provide training, as required and appropriate, for staff involved in land management to increase their understanding of the needs of pollinators and how they can help them in the course of their work.

OBJECTIVE 2

For Gedling Borough Council to work with partners across the county to better protect pollinators and improve the habitats on which they rely.

The Council will:

- Promote and support landscape scale projects that deliver habitat connectivity for pollinators.
- Work with the Council's planning and grounds maintenance teams to deliver improvements for pollinator habitats at the local level through, for example, their management of greenspace, local plans and development management.
- Where possible work to influence, our parish and town councils, communities, land owners, businesses and schools and support them to take action for pollinators.

OBJECTIVE 3

For Gedling Borough Council to raise awareness of the importance of pollinators and the need to safeguard these vital insects, mobilising our residents where we are able to take their own action within communities, workplaces, schools and homes.

The Council will:

- Deliver a rolling communication campaign to inform and influence the residents of the borough and engage them in action for pollinators.
- Encourage and support pollinator friendly gardening, especially in its allotments.
- Support schools in activities relating to pollinators through access to resources and activities.
- Build an expert network of advisors and mentors to help to guide and steer Plan Bee actions across the borough. hedgerows provide nesting sites for small mammals such as mice and field voles. Unused plots may support a range of wild plants and other wildlife.

OBJECTIVE 4

For Gedling Borough Council to monitor and evaluate its action for pollinators, so that we understand the impact of our efforts and direct continued action and resources to where they are most needed.

The Council will:

- Publish a Pollinator Policy and Action Plan to set actions and periodically report progress.
- Keep up to date on the latest scientific evidence on pollinator health and respond as appropriate in respect of decision-making, asset management and service delivery.

OBJECTIVE 5

For Gedling Borough Council to manage the land it owns, controls and influences in a way which benefits pollinators' habitat and forage including.

- Annual ecology surveys with monitoring of results.
- Number (area) of Borough estate sites with established wildflower areas.
- Number (area/length) of parks and open spaces with conservation cuts.
- Stop pesticide/herbicide use on Borough managed parks and open spaces, and manage estate in an active manner for pollinators.
- Gedling Borough Council will work with partners across the borough and county, including parish councils, to better protect pollinators and improve the habitats on which they rely.
- Raise awareness of the importance of pollinators and the need to safeguard them using Facebook and other social media engagement.
- Mobilise residents of the Borough to take their own action within their homes, communities, workplaces, schools, landowners, businesses etc.

THE LONG-TERM PLAN

This document is a continuing plan which is intended to be long term. The many actions set out and the raising of understanding and determination to act among the borough's residents will necessarily take time. It will come in phases; some of the work, like changing grass cutting regimes, has already taken place other setting aside of wildflower areas will take place again in the future. The need for action for pollinators, cannot be understated. It is imperative that we all engage in this policy and action plan to ensure the long terms survival of our biodiverse habitats.