

RUSTHALL PARISH COUNCIL

BIODIVERSITY AND SUSTAINABILITY POLICY

1. Introduction

Rusthall Parish Council recognises the importance of protecting and enhancing biodiversity, responding to climate change and using resources responsibly for the benefit of current and future generations.

The Council acknowledges that parish councils have an important local role to play in supporting nature recovery, protecting habitats and species, reducing environmental impacts and encouraging sustainable practices within the parish.

This policy sets out the Council's approach to biodiversity and sustainability and provides a framework for incorporating environmental considerations into its decisions, management of land and buildings, procurement and day-to-day activities.

2. Aims

The Council aims to:

- protect and enhance biodiversity on land that it owns or manages;
- maintain and improve habitats for wildlife and pollinators;
- encourage appropriate planting of native and wildlife-friendly species;
- manage grassland and other green spaces in ways that support biodiversity where practical;
- reduce waste and unnecessary consumption of resources;
- use energy, water and other resources responsibly;
- consider environmental impacts when purchasing goods and services;
- reduce pollution and avoid the unnecessary use of chemicals;
- support sustainable transport and active travel where appropriate;
- work with local residents, community groups, landowners and other organisations to encourage biodiversity and sustainability within the parish; and
- consider biodiversity and sustainability when making decisions, while taking account of cost, practicality, legal requirements and the Council's other responsibilities.

3. Biodiversity

The Council will seek to protect and enhance biodiversity on its land and, where appropriate, will consider opportunities to improve habitats through:

- planting and maintaining native trees, shrubs, hedges and wildflowers;
- providing suitable habitats for birds, insects, pollinators and other wildlife;
- allowing areas of grass to grow longer where this is appropriate and does not conflict with the intended use of the land;
- considering the timing and frequency of mowing to minimise harm to wildlife;
- retaining suitable deadwood, leaf litter and other natural habitat where it is safe and practical to do so;
- maintaining or creating wildlife corridors and links between habitats where opportunities arise;
- avoiding unnecessary removal of mature trees, hedgerows and other established habitats;
- considering biodiversity when planning new planting, landscaping or improvements to Council-owned land; and
- using peat-free compost and avoiding invasive or inappropriate plant species wherever practicable.

The Council will take account of public safety, accessibility, recreation, amenity, existing agreements and the intended use of land when determining appropriate management arrangements.

4. Trees and Hedgerows

Trees and hedgerows provide important habitats, contribute to the character of the parish and can help to reduce the effects of climate change.

The Council will, where appropriate:

- seek to retain healthy and suitable trees and hedgerows;
- consider replacement planting where trees need to be removed, subject to site suitability and available resources;
- encourage the planting of appropriate native species;
- take account of nesting birds and wildlife when arranging tree and hedge work; and
- obtain appropriate professional advice where necessary in relation to tree safety, disease, management or significant works.

Tree and hedge management will always give appropriate priority to public safety and legal obligations.

5. Grassland and Verges

Where the Council is responsible for grassed areas, it will consider whether different mowing regimes could support biodiversity.

Depending on the location and purpose of the land, this may include:

- reducing mowing frequency;
- allowing grass and wildflowers to grow longer during appropriate periods;
- creating or maintaining wildflower areas;
- maintaining shorter grass around paths, seating, play areas and other facilities where required; and
- communicating changes in grass management to residents to explain the environmental benefits.

The Council will seek to balance biodiversity objectives with the practical use of its land and the expectations of residents.

6. Pesticides, Herbicides and Chemicals

The Council will seek to minimise the use of pesticides, herbicides and other potentially harmful chemicals on land it owns or manages.

Where chemical treatment is considered necessary, the Council will:

- consider whether a non-chemical alternative is reasonably practicable;
- ensure that any contractor engaged to undertake the work uses appropriate products and follows relevant legislation and guidance;
- use the minimum effective treatment; and
- take appropriate steps to minimise risks to people, wildlife, watercourses and the wider environment.

7. Council Buildings and Energy Use

Where the Council owns or manages buildings, it will seek to improve their environmental performance where reasonably practicable and financially proportionate.

This may include:

- reducing unnecessary energy consumption;
- using energy-efficient lighting and equipment;
- considering renewable energy or low-carbon technologies when major works or replacements are planned;
- improving insulation where appropriate;
- avoiding unnecessary heating and lighting;
- encouraging responsible use of water; and
- considering the environmental impact of building improvements and maintenance.

Any proposed investment will be considered alongside financial affordability, expected benefits, maintenance requirements and the anticipated lifespan of the equipment or works.

8. Waste and Recycling

The Council will seek to reduce waste and promote reuse and recycling wherever practicable.

The Council will:

- avoid unnecessary printing and paper use;
- use electronic communication where appropriate;
- reuse office supplies and equipment where practical;
- recycle suitable materials;
- avoid unnecessary single-use items;
- consider the durability and lifespan of products before purchasing them; and
- dispose of waste responsibly and in accordance with legal requirements.

9. Procurement

When purchasing goods, services or works, the Council will consider environmental factors alongside price, quality, suitability and value for money.

Where appropriate, the Council may consider:

- the durability and expected lifespan of products;
- repairability and reuse;
- recycled or recyclable materials;
- energy efficiency;
- sustainable sourcing;
- packaging and waste;
- local suppliers and the environmental impact of transportation; and
- the environmental practices of contractors and suppliers.

The Council will continue to comply with its Financial Regulations and procurement requirements. Environmental considerations will not automatically override value for money or other legitimate Council requirements.

10. Contractors and Land Management

Where contractors undertake work on Council land, the Council will seek to ensure that appropriate environmental considerations are incorporated into specifications and contracts where relevant.

Contractors may be required to:

- minimise waste;
- dispose of waste responsibly;
- avoid unnecessary damage to habitats;
- use environmentally appropriate products where reasonably practicable;
- follow appropriate seasonal restrictions relating to wildlife; and

- comply with all relevant environmental legislation and health and safety requirements.

11. Planning and Development

The Council will consider biodiversity and sustainability when responding to planning applications and consultations.

Where appropriate, the Council may consider matters including:

- protection of existing trees and hedgerows;
- retention and enhancement of wildlife habitats;
- biodiversity net gain and habitat creation;
- protection of wildlife corridors;
- sustainable drainage;
- appropriate native planting;
- energy efficiency;
- sustainable transport and active travel;
- reduction of light pollution; and
- the impact of development on the character and environmental quality of the parish.

The Council will have regard to relevant national and local planning policies and guidance when making representations.

12. Working with the Community

The Council recognises that effective biodiversity and sustainability action is most successful when undertaken in partnership with the local community.

Where resources permit, the Council may:

- support community planting and wildlife projects;
- provide information about biodiversity and sustainable practices;
- work with local schools, community groups and environmental organisations;
- encourage residents to create wildlife-friendly gardens and spaces;
- support appropriate local environmental initiatives; and
- promote opportunities for residents to participate in nature recovery and environmental projects.

13. Decision-Making

Where relevant, biodiversity and sustainability will be considered as part of the Council's decision-making process.

When considering a significant project, procurement exercise, land-management decision or building improvement, the Council may consider:

1. What environmental impact will the proposal have?
2. Can any negative environmental impacts reasonably be reduced?
3. Are there opportunities to enhance biodiversity?
4. Can resources, energy or materials be used more efficiently?
5. Is there a more sustainable alternative that represents reasonable value for money?
6. Are there any relevant legal, planning or environmental requirements?

The Council will take a proportionate approach and will consider environmental factors alongside its other statutory duties, financial responsibilities and the needs of the community.

14. Biodiversity Duty

The Council will have regard to its statutory duties relating to biodiversity and will seek to contribute to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity through the management of its land, its activities and its decision-making.

The Council will keep under review relevant Government guidance and changes to legislation affecting parish councils and biodiversity.

15. Monitoring and Review

The Council will review this policy at least every three years, or sooner if there are significant changes to legislation, Government guidance or the Council's responsibilities.

Where appropriate, the Council may maintain a record of biodiversity and sustainability initiatives undertaken and use this information to identify future opportunities for improvement.

16. Responsibility

The Parish Council as a whole is responsible for implementing this policy.

The Clerk will support the Council in applying the policy to its day-to-day activities and will bring relevant environmental considerations to the Council's attention when appropriate. Individual projects may be delegated to a committee, working group, councillor or officer in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation and relevant decisions of the Council.

Adopted:

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