

How can local authorities help save bees?



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Bees are vital to our food crops, our gardens and our countryside, but they are declining – some species have become extinct, others are declining in range.

Friends of the Earth's Bee Cause campaign has persuaded the Government to adopt a National Pollinator Strategy, which has now been consulted on and which will be launched later in 2014.

On 18 July 2014 the Government – together with Friends of the Earth, National Farmers Union, National Trust, Waitrose, Women's Institute and others – issued a Call to Action to the public, farmers, businesses, public bodies and voluntary organisations.



Islington Friends of the Earth's Bee World in Highbury Fields

See www.wildlifetrusts.org/Bees-needs

We are asking local authorities to do all they can to help save our bees and other pollinators. This briefing sets out actions that can be taken in your area, including:

1. Creating a bee-friendly habitat or installing bee hotels
2. Passing a motion or adopting policy to protect bees
3. Adopting planning policy to protect or create habitat
4. Reviewing pesticide use
5. Encouraging businesses and community groups to take action for bees



Local authorities already have a Duty to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising their functions, introduced by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, which came into force on 1 October 2006. The Duty affects all public authorities and aims to raise the profile and visibility of biodiversity, to clarify existing commitments with regard to biodiversity, and to make it a natural and integral part of policy and decision making. Conserving biodiversity includes restoring and enhancing species' populations and habitats.

So, councils can both help to fulfil their legal duty, and respond to the Call to Action, by taking action for bees and other pollinators. And by helping pollinators, you will be helping a lot of other species too, creating spaces that are richer and more enjoyable for your residents.

Depending on how your council works, you might want to pass a motion about this in full council, or make it a decision for a cabinet member. A council meeting where you pass a motion could also be an occasion to invite other key landowners and stakeholders in your area and make it a joint commitment, as well as a good opportunity for publicity.



Bee world in Alcester, Warwickshire, by Redditch Friends of the Earth



Honeybees produce more honey in urban Birmingham than in the surrounding countryside

Initial results from the Urban Pollinators project found that in Leeds parks, rough grassland supports **3 times** as many pollinators as amenity grassland and perennial meadows supported **26 times** as many. The Urban Pollinators project is researching insect pollinators in urban habitats in the UK and will report on its results later in 2014.

www.bristol.ac.uk/biology/research/ecological/community/pollinators/

ALCESTER is now officially a bee-friendly town after a unanimous vote by Alcester Town Council in May 2014.

The environmental sub-committee's proposal aims to enhance bee diversity within and around the town as more people become worried about the decline of the black and yellow beasts.

Bees not only maintain wildlife but also pollinate plants which produce food. The Government has estimated that these pollinators are worth around £500 million to the UK food and fruit industries.

Alcester Councillor Nina Knapman, chair of the environmental sub-committee, said: "We want to provide more bee-friendly flowers for bees to feed upon in corridors that link around the town and to increase people's awareness of harmful pesticides, along with garden planting that is not of any use to bees. We want to provide an effective, user-friendly information exchange linking Alcester residents with bee-friendly organisations and partners and enhance residents feeling of well-being by creating Bee Worlds and trails that encourage people to get out and enjoy walking."

What can you do on your own land?

Create bee-friendly habitat – in parks, road verges, civic spaces, playing fields, and on land around offices and depots. It could be a wildflower meadow or include cultivated flowers and shrubs that provide pollen and nectar for bees. Eastbourne, for example, is now creating 40 areas of bee habitat. Friends of the Earth has produced its own guidance: www.foe.co.uk/beeworlds.

1. You could also change the specification issued to council contractors for bedding plants to ensure that the flowers chosen are good for pollinators – useful lists include the RHS Perfect for Pollinators selection (www.rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/encourage-wildlife-to-your-garden/plants-for-pollinators) and the Bumblebee Conservation Trust guide www.bumblebeeconservation.org/get-involved/spring-into-action/
2. Provide "bee hotels" on and around council buildings. We don't know of any local authorities doing this on a large scale, but Sainsbury's has put over 100 bee hotels for solitary bees on its stores – in one case leading to the reappearance of the red mason bee that had been absent in the location for 12 years (see www.j-sainsbury.co.uk/responsibility/case-studies/2011/bee-hotels). Hotels for solitary bees could be used in parks to provide nesting sites but thought would need to be given to their

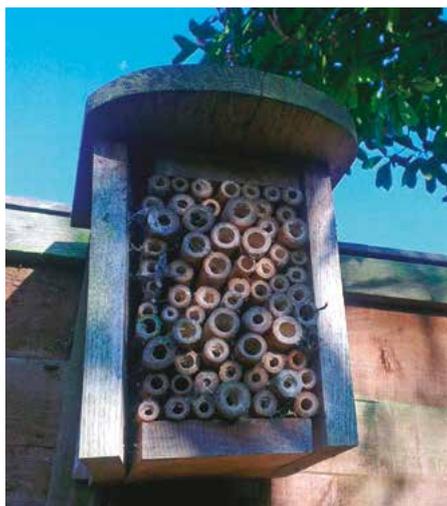
On Wednesday 19th September 2012, at a full meeting of Eastbourne Borough Council, Councillor Steve Wallis, holder of the Environment portfolio in the council's Cabinet, proposed a motion in support of the Bee Cause. The motion was as follows:

“that this authority supports the Friends of the Earth Bee Cause initiative, and will continue to ensure that where suitable, all planting undertaken within the parks and gardens owned by the Council will support bee and other pollinating insects’ lifestyles”

location to avoid vandalism. Bee hotels can easily be made (see www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/bee_hotel.pdf) or there are several companies that supply them.

3. Encourage local schools to create bee-friendly habitat and bee hotels. These could help schools gain Eco-School Awards – one school participating in Eco-Schools even saved seeds from its meadow to distribute to other schools nearby (see www.eco-schools.org.uk/gettingstarted/casestudies?id=595). There is growing evidence of the benefits to children of outdoor learning, so involving schools could bring educational and health benefits too (see www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/linkingpeople/learning/default.aspx).
4. Change mowing regimes on road verges etc to allow more wildflowers to bloom naturally. This can also be a way of linking areas of habitat. More information and case studies can be gained from Life on the Verge, lifeontheverge.org.uk/index-wolds.php.
5. Review pesticide use, with a view to reducing it, eliminating neonicotinoids especially, and where possible also reducing herbicide use – after all, many weeds are nectar-providers.

If you own allotment sites, encourage allotment holders to manage uncultivated areas for pollinators, and to avoid using pesticides. The Urban Pollinators project has a guide for allotment holders wanting to plant colourful pollinator-friendly plants: www.urbanpollinators.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/tried-and-tested-pollinator-friendly.html.



A bee hotel

What can you do as a regulatory body?

The planning system has a crucial role to play in helping to reverse bee decline and boost biodiversity. It can help to protect existing bee habitat, particularly for rare bee species, and create new habitat for all our vital pollinators:

1. Review planning policy to ensure that sites important to bees and other pollinators are mapped, identified in your local plan and given adequate protection. Sites with no existing designation for biodiversity, including brownfield sites, may be important for pollinators.

Buglife has produced guidance on planning and invertebrates, including how to ensure that a good quality survey is carried out on development sites: www.buglife.org.uk/good-practice-planning-invertebrates.
2. Similarly, ensure that policies in your Local Plan require new developments to create new pollinator habitat suitable to the scale of development, from new wildflower meadows, and bee-friendly landscaping of gardens to green roofs, green walls, and bee hotels.

Incorporating green space into development also makes it more pleasant as an amenity and more resilient to climate change, and is better for the health of people living and working there. And achieving gains for nature through planning is in line with the National Planning Policy Framework ambition to move “from a net loss of biodiversity to achieving net gains for nature.”

The Town and Country Planning Association has produced useful guidance for local authorities on making sure that local plans and new development deliver a network of wildlife-rich places, and includes some best practice case studies: www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/planning-for-a-healthy-environment-good-practice-for-green-infrastructure-and-biodiversity.html.

3. Ensure that planning officers have access to ecological expertise to ensure that the needs of pollinators are properly considered. The Association of Local Government Ecologists found that many local planning authorities do not have either the capacity or the competence to undertake the effective, and in some cases legally necessary, assessment of planning applications where biodiversity is a material consideration (see www.cieem.net/data/files/Resource_Library/News/ALGE_Report_on_Ecological_Compence_and_Capacity.pdf).



Spraying pesticides

Nottingham City Council has committed to the following measures to reduce pesticides:

"We're reviewing our use of pesticides - trying to avoid those thought to be damaging to bees. We're going to try out an area of the City where no herbicides are used and wild flowers are allowed to grow and flower where otherwise they would be removed using herbicides."

www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/bees

What can you do as a leadership body within the wider community?

1. Hold a bee summit – Eastbourne and Oxford have found this a good way to find out who is active on the issue. They invited local nature conservation groups, landowners and other interested parties to come together and discuss what can be done locally to encourage pollinator habitat creation by other organisations and businesses.
2. Give awards for the best pollinator garden in any local "In Bloom" competitions, and/or hold a competition for the best bee-friendly workplace or school garden.
3. Hold events for local people to get involved in bee-friendly planting or in making bee hotels. For example, Nottingham City Council is holding "Bee Friendly" events in parks around the city: www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/bees.
4. Work with Friends of Parks groups to involve them in creating and managing pollinator habitat in parks, and consider providing grants and/or seeds to enable them to create bee meadows.
5. Publicise the plight of bees and encourage residents to help them in their own gardens.

Do tell us what you are doing – we are keen to publicise good examples around the country.



1. Passing a motion or adopting a policy?
2. Creating bee-friendly habitat, installing bee hotels?
3. Planning policy to protect/create habitat?
4. Reviewing pesticide use?
5. Encouraging businesses and community groups to take action for bees?

Please send any information to beeinfo@foe.co.uk

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