

Sustainable Shaftesbury Biodiversity Checklist



Good biodiversity

Modest biodiversity

Poor biodiversity

Date of Adoption: February 2024
Review Due: February 2027

Introduction

What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity concerns the whole range of living things, from flowering plants to birds, from butterflies to mosses and lichens and even bacteria—in other words the whole variety of life. It. All live in a complex web and often depend on each other to thrive. Biodiversity also refers to the wide range of habitats which plants and animals depend upon. It is not just about rare or threatened species; it embraces all life, from the commonplace to the greatly endangered, both above and below ground.

The conservation of biological diversity is central to the principle of sustainable development which strikes a balance between the environment, economic activity and social justice. In 1992, the UK was one of over 150 countries to sign the 'Convention on Biological Diversity' at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. In response to this the government produced a UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) in 1994, followed by a series of action plans for priority habitats and species. Together, these provide a framework for conserving and enhancing biodiversity in the UK. More recently, the UK Government has committed to halting and reversing the loss of nature by 2030 and will be updating its biodiversity policies with the aim of ensuring biodiversity considerations become embedded in all main sectors of public policy.

Shaftesbury Town Council responded to this with its own biodiversity policy in January 2021 and this has now been updated with this biodiversity checklist which now complements and forms part of the council's **Sustainable Shaftesbury Policy and Action Masterplan 2023–2031** to guide management of all aspects of local life where STC has a role. This includes parks, allotments, gardens, cemeteries, open spaces within developments and linear corridors—in fact anywhere where nature can, should and must flourish.



Checklist

Pesticide Use

1. Stop using weedkiller and other pesticides

Widespread use of weedkiller and other pesticides like slug pellets or insecticides costs a lot of money, pose risks to health, and destroys vital aspects of the ecosystem. It's also indiscriminate in the wildlife that it kills, it pollutes waterways and it sticks around in the soil far longer than it should. Specifically, STC has banned the use of glyphosate in sensitive areas of the town, such as those rich in wildlife, play areas, dog walking areas and high tourist areas.

2. Cease the use of chemical fertilisers and peat

Chemical fertilisers and peat should not be used. High-nitrogen fertilisers create species-poor monoculture grassland. Compost should be used instead.

Artificial fertiliser is harmful to soil health, suppressing populations of beneficial bacteria and fungi and even earthworms.

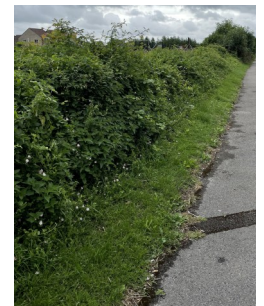
Chemical fertiliser creates poor soil, which begins a dependency cycle and contributes to soil erosion and run-off because soil poor in microorganisms isn't very good at retaining water and nutrients. Most of our native wildflower species don't do well in artificially fertilised soil, and it's an unnecessary cost.

Nature & Wildlife

3. Cut hedges outside of bird-nesting season

Birds nesting season is from the start of March to the end of August inclusive and although it's not a criminal offence to cut hedges during this time, it is a criminal offence to disturb nest-building or nesting birds.

Although some tree work—such as emergency work to reduce flooding risk—can be carried out with great care during bird nesting season, the vast majority of tree and hedge work should be done outside of this period. There's really no need to cut hedges between March and August and doing so puts our breeding birds at risk.



4. Mow less often

Longer grass is incredibly important to our insect life, and our insect life supports our birds, bats, and hedgehogs as well as offering a host of ecosystem services like pollination and nutrient recycling.

Very short monoculture grass is not ideal habitat for most insects, leaving some areas of grass to grow longer is a cost-saving way of promoting biodiversity. It allows the growth of wildflowers like clover which benefit bees and allows areas for foraging hedgehogs and hunting barn owls.

Sports pitches and picnic areas to be kept short whilst other area left to grow longer to provide a biodiversity boost.

Cut-and-collect mowers should be used and the arisings composted. Aim to leave as many areas of dandelions, daisies, buttercups, etc to flower, where possible. Areas with longer grass to be cut occasionally to prevent them turning into scrub.

Operators always to check for hedgehogs, other small mammals, slow worms and other wildlife before mowing or strimming.

5. Leave roadside verges to grow wild

Roadside verges are critical for our plant life. Not only do flowery verges bring us joy, they also play host to all 700 species of our wild plants, 87 of which are facing extinction.

They support rare plant species and provide great habitat for all kinds of invertebrates and small mammals—which is why if you're lucky you'll see owls hunting along roadside verges that have been allowed to grow. Collecting the cuttings where possible removes the fertilisation of dominant grasses and increases biodiversity.

Regularly cutting or mowing roadside verges is not only awkward and costly but also unnecessary. Wildflower verges only need to be cut once or twice a year.

Not all road verges can be uncut, however, especially those where sight lines are needed and right next to busy roads where insects are likely to be hit by cars. Verges that have gardens/hedges/banks behind them are preferable. There is a need to be selective.



6. Keep deadwood

Deadwood is an extremely important habitat that is in sharp decline, and the distance between deadwood is causing a big problem in terms of habitat fragmentation. Leave branches that fall below trees where they are, leave standing deadwood in situ and (where they don't block paths or rivers) leave fallen trees where they lie. Removing deadwood is costly and unnecessary—it's beautiful and interesting, and it punches way above its weight when it comes to supporting biodiversity.

Branches and logs cut by tree surgeons should be made into log piles as refuges for wildlife and insects.



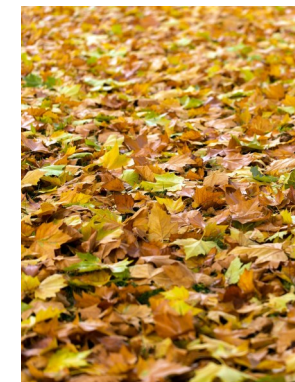
7. Reduce removal of dead leaves and stop using leaf blowers

Trees don't always extract all the good stuff from their leaves before they drop them and dead leaves are an important source of nutrients for the tree that shed them.

As well as fertilising the tree and surrounding plant life, dead leaves provide habitat for invertebrates and small mammals.

Where the removal of fallen leaves is necessary (such as where they pose a real risk to pedestrians or restrict access), the movement or removal should be done manually and the leaves collected on a compost heap.

Leaf blowers are polluting, and studies have shown that they seriously harm insect populations as they damage insects when they blow them away—in fact, leaf blowers have been banned in many US cities and the German government has said that leaf blowers must not be used unless absolutely necessary.



8. Use native plants and sow wildflower meadows

Native plants and wildflower meadows provide much-needed sources of food for our pollinators, and they look lovely too. They're also low maintenance

because once sown, they don't need to be managed—just cut once a year. Native wildflower seed balls can be bought for relatively low cost and can be sown into bare earth—some can even be sown over grass. The important thing is not to fertilise the area—not only because of the problems with chemical fertilisers but also because wildflowers like poor soil, so fertilising does them no good.



Perform year-round surveys of the wild flowers that grow here locally to inform future management and avoid loss.

Adopt a wild flowers policy to conserve and encourage the species that want to grow here such as wild garlic, cuckoo flowers, bluebells, red campion, stitchwort, primroses and the like.

Areas of grass can be 'improved' by planting wildflower plugs and letting them spread naturally.

9. Put up bird and bat boxes

Support local wildlife by putting up nest and bat boxes, which is a great community engagement activity.

Encourage community nature-based organisations to run workshops teaching people to make them, or get volunteers involved in putting them up and monitoring their residents.

They're relatively cheap and once up they stay in place and continue to benefit wildlife for years to come (providing they are cleaned out each year after use—boiling water will kill the mites).



This doesn't apply to swift boxes—they don't make nests. Where feasible swift boxes and house martin cups to be put up on Council owned buildings.

10. Engage with residents

Support and advise residents on how they can get involved.

11. Water for wildlife

Make rainwater available for wildlife (birds and mammals) to drink and bathe in on the top of the hill, e.g. Queen Mothers Garden and Park Walk Garden.

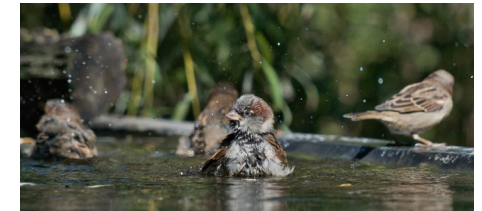
12. Tree and hedge development

Develop a policy for trees and hedges planting and management in relation to climate change.

All town council-owned hedges should be thickened up (made wider) to improve them as habitats for wildlife and to help stop the spread of vehicle pollutants and to buffer noise. Some shrub species are better than others at capturing particulates.

Hedges should not be cut at the same height each year—this weakens them.

Local species of trees in relation to climate change will thrive better here as the temperatures rise. Liaison with Dorset Highways and the Dorset tree officer is needed in relation to planting more trees and hedges along our road verges.



13. Re-wild the fringes of public open spaces

Allow a 2–3 metre border around the edges of all publicly-managed open spaces, including school playing fields, parks and allotments, to grow wild or 'rewild' naturally. This will have savings in money and time with mowing.

14. Link up 'nature' areas with 'corridors'

As far and as much as possible all 'nature;' areas in the parish (open spaces, allotments, parks, playing and recreational areas etc) should be physically linked with each other with 'nature corridors' to allow easy transmission and migration of wildlife and flowering plant species. This should include links with and into the surrounding countryside.

Use hedges, trees, scrub and so on to link green spaces. Allow the natural regeneration of trees and shrubs.

Note: Management plans for each town council green space are under development and will include the STC Pollinator Action Plan and invasive species/injurious weeds reference documents. These documents will form another appendix to the overall Sustainable Shaftesbury Policy and Action Masterplan when adopted.