

# Somerset County Council

## Pollinator Action Plan 2018-2028



# Somerset County Council Pollinator Action Plan

## 2018-2028

### A Commitment from the Somerset County Council

Somerset County Council is committed to helping to conserve the UK's pollinators by ensuring the council will consider the needs of pollinators in the delivery of its duties and work.

Somerset County Council will seek to protect and increase the amount and quality of pollinator habitat and manage its greenspace to provide greater benefits for pollinators.

***Our Vision: Our local environment will be abundant in flower-rich habitats, helping support sustainable pollinator populations and making Somerset's urban and rural spaces attractive for people to live and work.***

### Aims

1. Ensure the needs of pollinators are represented in local plans, policy and guidance.
2. Encourage Somerset District and Borough Councils, and Exmoor National Park Authority to adopt and follow the Somerset Pollinator Action Plan.
3. Protect, increase and enhance the amount of pollinator habitat in Somerset to prevent extinctions and improve the status of any locally threatened species.
4. Increase awareness of pollinators and their habitat needs across local residents, businesses and other landowners.
5. Increase the contribution to pollinator conservation of all land under the ownership of, or managed by the Council.
6. Improve our knowledge and understanding of pollinators in our local area.

### The 4Cs describe our values

Somerset County Council work together, establishing positive, respectful and empowering ways of working as strong teams. We act with integrity, communicating clearly, admitting our mistakes and striving to learn from them. When we think we need to speak out or challenge, we are prepared to do so in a constructive and positive way, but we remain objective.

Our values can be summarised in the 4 'C's:



## Background to the Pollinator Action Plan

### The Importance of Pollinators

Our native pollinators include bumblebees and other bees (250 species), butterflies and moths, flies, beetles and wasps. In all there are over 4000 species of insect in the UK that carry out pollination of our native wild plants and our food crops. Insect pollination is extremely important to the UK economy, with estimated values of £691 million annually. Without pollinators we would struggle to grow many of our vegetables, fruits and crops, including apples, pears, strawberries, beans, peas and oilseed rape.

#### Pollinators under threat

Our pollinators are in trouble

- Half of our 27 bumblebee species are in decline.
- Three of these bumblebee species have already gone extinct.
- Two-thirds of our moths are in long term decline.
- Across Europe 38% of bee and hoverfly species are in decline.
- A study published in 2017 found a 75% decline over 27 years in total flying insect biomass in protected areas in Germany, which is thought to be representative throughout similar habitats and landscape across Europe (<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0185809>)
- 71% of our butterflies are in decline.

#### The most significant factors leading to these declines in pollinator numbers include:

- 1. Habitat loss** – The most significant cause of decline is the loss and degradation of habitats which provide food, shelter and nesting sites for pollinators. The loss of wildflower-rich grasslands is one of the most important issues. Over 3 million hectares of these habitats have been lost in England alone since the 1930s, the loss being attributed to more intensive farming and urban/industrial development.<sup>1</sup>
- 2. Pests and diseases** – Bacterial infections and parasitic mites can result in the death of any bees, but especially colonial species, including honey bee.
- 3. Pesticides** – There is growing evidence that the use of pesticides is having harmful effects on pollinators including honeybees, wild bees and butterflies. Wider effects throughout ecosystems are also of concern and pesticides have been implicated in other declines such

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320787901212>

as farmland birds and soil organisms. The use of neonicotinoids is of particular concern. These are systemic pesticides which can be applied as a seed dressing (the preferred delivery mechanism) or spray and have a high toxicity to insects.

The use of neonics as a preventative measure against insect infestation is, however, contrary to the long-established principles of integrated pest management where a variety of non-chemical controls may be utilised to reduce the potential for infestation such as biological control, habitat manipulation, modification of agricultural practices and the use of resistant plant varieties along with minimal use of pesticides.

Neonics are generally toxic to insects even in minute quantities, and recent scientific studies have demonstrated that they can persist and accumulate in soil, and can be found to be present in wildflowers and field margins as well as the crops for which they are intended. As they are water soluble they are also prone to leaching into surface waters such as streams and rivers, and into our groundwater. Most organisms inhabiting arable environments will therefore be exposed to them.

Much of the controversy over the use of neonics has focussed on their effects on bees. Neonics are routinely used on oilseed rape, maize and winter wheat, and these crops are major forage sources for both managed honeybees and wild pollinators in arable landscapes. Although there is little evidence for direct mortality in bees there is strong evidence for sub-lethal effects which reduce the ability to forage and navigate properly, impacting the viability of colonies. Research has also linked the decline of some aquatic insects, insectivorous birds and butterflies to neonics.

In December 2013 the European Commission therefore introduced a precautionary ban on the three most common neonicotinoid pesticides. The ban relates to use on crops such as oilseed rape and the sowing of dressed (treated) seed during spring and summer when bees are foraging. It allows continued use on crops less likely to be attractive to bees but does not take into account the impacts on other insects, aquatic invertebrates or birds. It is possible also for areas within EU Member States to seek temporary exemptions from this ban.

Setting out the UK's position, the Secretary of State said the UK supports further restrictions on the use of these pesticides. Unless the scientific evidence changes, the government will likely maintain these increased restrictions post-Brexit.

This follows advice from the UK government's advisory body on pesticides which said scientific evidence now suggests the environmental risks posed by neonicotinoids – particularly to our bees and pollinators – are greater than previously understood, supporting the case for further restrictions.

- 4. Climate Change** – Long term changes can deprive pollinators of food supplies at times when they need them, increase their exposure to parasites and diseases, or change habitats so that they are no longer suitable. There may be gains as well as losses but a

resilient network of good pollinator habitat across the area is needed for them to be able to adapt and take advantage of changes.

## National Pollinator Strategy

The Government's National Pollinator Strategy (2014) sets out a 10 year plan to help pollinating insects survive and thrive across England. The Strategy outlines actions to support and protect the many pollinating insects which contribute to our food production and the diversity of our environment. It is a shared plan of action which looks to everyone to work together and ensure pollinators' needs are addressed as an integral part of land and habitat management.



### The Strategy includes the following outcomes:

1. More, bigger, better, joined-up, diverse and high-quality flower-rich habitats (including nesting places and shelter) supporting our pollinators across the country.
2. Healthy bees and other pollinators which are more resilient to climate change and severe weather events.
3. No further extinctions of known threatened pollinator species.
4. Enhanced awareness across a wide range of businesses, other organisations and the public of the essential needs of pollinators.
5. Evidence of actions taken to support pollinators.

In particular the Strategy asks local authorities to take a lead across many of their work areas and duties, including their role in local planning and also as managers of public and amenity spaces, brownfield sites, schools, car parks, roadside verges and roundabouts.

## Pollinators in Somerset

The South West is of national importance for bees, due to the unique conditions resulting from a combination of climate and great diversity of habitats. The region is home to nationally rare and threatened species, and for some, the South West supports a national stronghold or the last known population in the UK.

Areas of particular note for our threatened bees are Bodmin Moor, the North Cornish coast and the Lizard Peninsular (Cornwall), The South Devon Coast, Dartmoor and Exmoor (Devon), the Dorset heaths and chalk grasslands, the Forest of Dean and parts of the Severn River valley (Gloucestershire), the Somerset Levels and Mendip Hills (Somerset), and Salisbury Plain (Wiltshire).

In 2013 Buglife's [South West Bees Report](#) focused on 23 bee species considered to be most at risk in the South West. Twelve of the target species occur in Somerset, but six target species have been lost.

## Key Principals of the Strategy

The Somerset County Council Pollinator Action Plan has been developed to raise awareness of the plight of pollinators and to ensure the Council and its local residents, businesses and

landowners are provided with information to help us all protect and increase our pollinator populations. This strategy is designed to ensure the needs of pollinators are enshrined across the breadth of Council work and to increase awareness of pollinators across our local community.

## **Working with partners and partners initiatives**

Where possible the Council will join forces and participate in other local, regional or national pollinator programmes or projects. Such partners include, or are likely to include, Friends of the Earth, Somerset Wildlife Trust, Somerset Environmental Records Centre , Buglife, Plantlife, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Natural England, Farming and Willdife Advisory Group (FWAG) and Somerset Ditrict and Borough Councils and Exmoor National Park Authority, however further collaboration with the community and other groups can be expected. More joined up collaborative action for pollinators will help ensure a future for these very important species. Key national initiatives include Friends of the Earth's *Bee Cause* campaign to reverse bee decline in the UK, Buglife's *B-Lines* programme which aims to create a network of wildflower-rich areas across the UK and Plantlife's *campaign to protect wildflowers and nature on roadside verges*.

# Somerset County Council Pollinator Action Plan: Objectives and Actions

**Aim 1: To ensure the needs of pollinators are represented in local plans, policy and guidance.**

	Objective	Specific Action
1.1	Increase the protection afforded to pollinator habitats and the species they support by ensuring appropriate recognition in local plans and policies	<p>Review existing surveys, biodiversity mapping and ecological networks to identify key pollinator habitats present throughout Somerset.</p> <p>Investigate and analyse pollinator habitat data, and if deemed robust, create a specific Pollinator Ecological Network.</p> <p>Take forward a review, and where required revise current policies to take account of the needs of pollinators.</p> <p>Alterations to the Environmental Maintenance Information Sheet 2017 will address the management of hedges and banks. As the majority of hedges and banks are privately owned, land owners will be advised to trim hedges and banks bordering roads once every three years where the practise is deemed appropriate for road user health and safety and appropriate to highways regulations (See: <a href="http://Somerset">http://Somerset</a> <a href="http://www.cfeonline.org.uk/managinghedges_online/">www.cfeonline.org.uk/managinghedges_online/</a> and <a href="https://beefriendlymonmouthshire.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/bfmhedgerow-manifesto.pdf">https://beefriendlymonmouthshire.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/bfmhedgerow-manifesto.pdf</a>)</p>
1.2	Increase the profile of habitats of value to pollinators in biodiversity asset, green infrastructure and other maps	<p>Survey habitats, including brownfield, parks, verges etc. to assess their importance for pollinators.</p> <p>Encourage and support longer term monitoring programme and involve local volunteers, helps raise awareness as a well as gather data if done well</p> <p>Promote volunteer delivery of surveys through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme <a href="https://www.ceh.ac.uk/our-science/projects/pollinator-monitoring">https://www.ceh.ac.uk/our-science/projects/pollinator-monitoring</a></li> <li>- BeeWalk <a href="http://www.beewalk.org.uk/">http://www.beewalk.org.uk/</a> ,</li> <li>- Butterfly transects <a href="http://www.ukbms.org/">http://www.ukbms.org/</a></li> <li>- Moth recording <a href="http://www.mothscount.org/">http://www.mothscount.org/</a></li> </ul> <p>Review and revise biodiversity asset maps to recognise importance of pollinator habitats.</p>

Somerset County Council Pollinator Action Plan 2018-2028

		After the completion of task 5.1, pollinator rich sites will be identified and promoted online as a feature of interest with information on the site, pollinators present and the best times to visit.
1.3	Recognise and capitalise on opportunities to create pollinator friendly habitats as part of new development	Raise awareness of and promote the creation of pollinator friendly features with developers throughout Somerset.
		Use Section 106 agreements and conditions, where appropriate, to ensure greenspaces in new developments are made pollinator friendly.
		Assess and promote the benefits to pollinators from retaining and maintaining brownfield sites. Where appropriate retain and designing favourable brownfield features within new development. <a href="https://www.buglife.org.uk/brownfield-hub">https://www.buglife.org.uk/brownfield-hub</a>
		Somerset Ecology Services (Somerset County Council's Ecological consultancy traded service) will, where appropriate, provide recommendations to external clients and internal departments for a pollinator action plan as part of ecological consultations.
		Advising conditions, where appropriate, for Landscape and Ecological Management Plans (LEMPs) during planning consultations that encourage and support pollinators within new development and 'local pollinator action plans' within large residential and industrial developments.

**Aim 2: Protect, increase and enhance the amount of pollinator habitat in Somerset to prevent extinctions and improve the status of any locally threatened species.**

	Objective	Specific Action
2.1	Increase the value of Local Wildlife Sites for pollinators	Ensure the needs of pollinators are taken into account in the management of all Local Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites which are owned or managed by the Council.
		Provide information on the needs of pollinators to other owners /managers of Local Wildlife Sites
2.2	Increase the value of parks and other greenspace for pollinators	Reduce grass cutting by 25% on council owned green spaces.  The key point with grass cutting regimes, whether on verges or in parks, is the reduction of fertility by removing the clippings.

		<p>Where feasible spread the seed of pollen and nectar-rich native wildflowers</p> <p>Provide an update to the Somerset Garden and Urban Greenspace action plan to increase native floral biodiversity in Urban Greenspaces, and to list pollinators as part of the 'Plan species and habitats'.</p> <p>In the "local status" section of the Somerset Garden and Urban Greenspace action plan, target amenity sites, parks and open green space in Districts, Boroughs and Exmoor National Park, making site managers aware of the benefits of managing land in a pollinator friendly way. Inform them of the 'Bees Needs' and verges plan to assess whether such management plans would be applicable to these sites. <a href="http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/bees-needs">http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/bees-needs</a></p> <p>Identify and designate areas of parkland where recreational or amenity value would not be compromised , to have a carefully designed reduced cutting regime in order to increase pollinator friendly plants whilst reducing management costs.</p> <p>Investigate funding for the planting of pollinator friendly plugs, seeds and trees that increase availability of nectar and pollen sources.</p> <p>In designated pollinator areas within parks, urban gardens and green spaces, including RoWs, road verges and roundabouts, encourage park managers to leave stacked untreated wood to provide nesting sites for pollinators and other invertebrates.</p> <p>Work with local communities to develop a balanced approach to park management to support a range of uses and wildlife benefits.</p>
2.3	Reduce the impact of pesticides on pollinators and other wildlife	<p>Review use of pesticides by the Council and aim to reduce where practical and where alternative methods are available.</p> <p>Cease use of neonicotinoids including seed dressings, plants and turf on all council owned land.</p> <p>Provide information on the effects of neonicotinoids on pollinator species and offer information about Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to landowners and farmers. <a href="https://friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/farming-without-neonicotinoids-100611.pdf">https://friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/farming-without-neonicotinoids-100611.pdf</a></p>

		<p>While three of the neonics are banned, there are four that are not, two of which are readily available at garden centres or online. Thiacloprid (in Bayer's Provado Ultimate Bug Killer range, Multirose Bug Killer and Baby Bio House Plant Insecticide) and acetamiprid (in Scott's Bug Clear and Rose Clear). By making the public aware of the effects of these chemicals, consumers can then make a conscious decision whether to use these chemicals in their gardens or not. Educate the public on these choices through social media</p>
		<p>Promote the use of the Bee Connected website to allow beekeepers to reduce the impact of sprayed insecticides near their hives. (<a href="https://beeconnected.org.uk/">https://beeconnected.org.uk/</a>)</p>

**Aim 3: Increase awareness of pollinators and their habitat needs across local residents, businesses and other landowners**

	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Specific Action</b>
3.1	Increase awareness of pollinators in the local community and within local businesses	Provide information on pollinator friendly gardening activities to local residents and businesses.
		Advise the creation of pollinator friendly flower beds in district and borough country parks, schools, council property grounds and along Rights of Way and pollinator interpretation panels.
		Promote pollinators to local business forums and individual businesses as a way to help biodiversity and improve the local environment.
		Promote pollinators and advise on suitable management regimes to 'Friends' groups and other community based groups who manage their local green spaces.
		Encourage the setting up of a twinning scheme between community green space management groups with local landowners / farmers who may have access to machinery and skills to create wildflower areas on green space and cut for hay The twinning scheme could be extended to also link interested groups, schools, businesses to access further expertise to advise on wildflower and other planting options and management and link seed sources to seed sinks

		<p>Provision of a platform (5.1 &amp; 5.2) to view data on pollinator status and abundance in the area with regular updates, for example a Facebook group, see Get Bristol Buzzing Facebook Group and listed websites. This may allow for an informal discussion about what can be done on a small scale to help pollinators in gardens and other urban spaces (<a href="http://www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/my-wild-city/get-bristol-buzzing/greater-bristol-pollinator-strategy">http://www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/my-wild-city/get-bristol-buzzing/greater-bristol-pollinator-strategy</a>)</p>
		<p>Design and promote an interactive online platform to allow community members and business to feel involved in the movement to conserve pollinators and let us know what they are doing to help. See: (<a href="http://www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/mywildcityinteractivemap">http://www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/mywildcityinteractivemap</a>)</p>
3.2	<p>Increase the number of young people who understand the value of their local pollinators</p>	<p>Encourage local schools to develop wildflower areas and other pollinator friendly plants and trees in school grounds.</p> <p>Develop a pollinator award or certificate for schools, accredited by SCC, FoE and SWT.</p> <p>As part of 5.1, outreach to local primary schools, colleges their associated biology/conservation clubs and groups to take part in the monitoring of pollinators either on campus or a site of choice, such as gardens (widening the reach of the survey), to then submit data.</p> <p>Provision of age appropriate recording and identifying materials to then be passed on to us from the group leaders/teachers.</p> <p>Continue to push the social media platform for pollinator discussion by making the content appealing to all ages, including young people.</p> <p>Arrange experts to run sessions in schools to get young people interested in pollinators and their habitats.</p> <p>Contacting local schools Design and Technology departments and offering information about the importance of housing solitary bees and suitable design templates for 'Bee Hotels', in the hope that the staff will incorporate the making of Bee Hotels into the syllabus, to either be distributed about the school or taken home to gardens.</p>

**Aim 4: To increase the contribution to pollinator conservation of all land under the ownership of, or managed by the Council**

	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Specific Action</b>
4.1	Make council owned land and buildings more pollinator friendly	<p><b>Highways:</b> Somerset County Council will seek, where appropriate, to increase the ecological value of its verges to pollinators by encouraging the growth of wildflowers, continuing to reduce cutting frequency and ensure clearing away of cuttings.</p> <p>Review the Highways Environmental Maintenance Information Sheet - 2017: establish re-seeding areas with wildflowers, with appropriate cutting dates inserted into the "grass cutting programme" table, from mid-July to late September.</p> <p>Verges allocated for specific cutting to be registered as a 'Special Road Verge'.</p> <p>Carry out operational reviews of increases on road verges requiring specific cutting regime, with recommendations for improvements to service implemented where evidence suggests better ways of working.</p> <p>Continue the existing practice of cutting verges within one metre of the carriageway currently in place for a number of locations throughout the county.</p> <p>Trial the use of grass verge arisings within anaerobic bio-digesters to provide bio-fuels to be sold as additional income generation.</p> <p>Improve the value of Council property and office green spaces to pollinator species by taking action in accordance to the 'Bee's Needs' advice when managing green spaces.</p> <p>Installing 'Bee Hotels' within council property and office green spaces and maintaining them to provide nesting sites for bees.</p> <p>Promote the installation of green roofs and or pollinator nesting features to be installed on new Council buildings and publicise this work as good practice.</p>
4.2	Implement the UK Government's ban on the outdoor use of three neonicotinoids - Clothianidin, Imidacloprid and Thiamethoxam.	<p>Educate tenants on the risks to wildlife when using neonicotinoids and other pollinator harming pesticides for pest control and better promote the use of integrated pest control, to reduce the need for harmful pesticides on Council land.</p> <p>Where there is power to do so, the Council will prohibit the use of the neonicotinoid and other pollinator harming pesticides that have been linked to the decline in pollinators</p>

		on Council land
4.3	Increase the area of pollinator habitats on local greenspace managed by local groups	Encourage the planting of flower species and management of habitats of benefit to pollinator species in public green spaces. (See: <a href="https://www.plantlife.org.uk/application/files/4614/8232/2916/Road_verge_guide_17_6.pdf">https://www.plantlife.org.uk/application/files/4614/8232/2916/Road_verge_guide_17_6.pdf</a> ).

#### **Aim 5: To improve our knowledge and understanding of pollinators in our local area**

	Objective	Specific Action
5.1	Establish effective monitoring of work being carried out in our area	Create a platform for the collation and access of pollinator distribution abundance data across Somerset either as a bespoke website or through a partner like the Somerset Wildlife Trust or the Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC).
		Alternatively offer greater support and promotion to the data recording done by SERC, the Great British Bee Count and its volunteers with regards to pollinator populations.
		Contact local groups of interest and offer the opportunity to take part in county wide surveys of pollinator species and engage members of the public to take part in the Great British Bee Count ( <a href="https://friendsoftheearth.uk/bee-count">https://friendsoftheearth.uk/bee-count</a> ) and the National Pollinator Monitoring Scheme ( <a href="https://www.ceh.ac.uk/our-science/projects/pollinator-monitoring">https://www.ceh.ac.uk/our-science/projects/pollinator-monitoring</a> )
		Promote user friendly resources for the identification of pollinator species.
		Encourage staff and contractors to feed back on actions they take for pollinators and provide an award for best practice.
		Carry out a brief review of achievements annually and publicise success to local communities  This will include an assessment of the effectiveness of any action taken in the previous year to support Somerset's pollinator populations.
5.2	Increase information on the status of pollinators	Encourage local people to support national pollinator monitoring schemes.

Somerset County Council Pollinator Action Plan 2018-2028

		<p>Based on the data collected in 5.1, an interactive map will be included with a potential 'Somerset pollinator website page' indicating regions of high or low pollinator diversity, at surveyed sites.</p>
		<p>Akin to Natural England's MAGIC map application, established and highlighted sites important to pollinators (including Section 41 species under the NERC act) will provide a baseline for habitat management advice and planning consultations.</p>