

Pollinators and Neonicotinoids

Joint Report of the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment and Head of Business Strategy and Support

Please note that the following recommendation is subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

Recommendation: It is recommended that Cabinet approves the Devon County Council Pollinators' Action Plan attached to this report.

1. Summary

This report seeks approval for the Devon County Council Pollinators' Action Plan, which is attached.

2. Background/introduction

The Place Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 7 March 2016 (Minute *118) considered the Report of the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment (PTE/16/13) on the impact on pollinators of neonicotinoids, prepared in response to the Notice of Motion by Councillor Hook submitted to the County Council on 10 December 2015 and referred by Cabinet to the Scrutiny Committee. That Committee was asked to comment upon the desirability of producing a Pollinators' Action Plan through which more detailed consideration might be given to any relevant restrictions on the use of neonicotinoids on County Council property and any opportunities to support the conservation of bees and pollinators. The Committee subsequently resolved:

- (a) that the Committee welcome and endorse the principle of a Pollinators' Action Plan being produced covering the issues outlines in Report PTE/16/13 and that Cabinet be recommended to adopt and implement such a Plan at the earliest opportunity;*
- (b) that in addition Cabinet be strongly advised to take all necessary steps where possible to prohibit the use of neonicotinoids on land under the control or ownership of the County Council including existing and new tenants of the County Farms Estate;*
- (c) that the County Council engage other Councils in Devon and partner organisations to take similar action to that outlined above.*

Cabinet at its meeting on 13 April 2016 considered the above and resolved:

*'that the Scrutiny Committee's views be noted and approval, in principle, be given to the adoption of a Pollinators' Action Plan and Officers be asked to further explore the practicalities of the proposed actions at (b) above, seeking also the views of the County Farms Estate Committee as appropriate and report further to Cabinet as soon as practicable (Minutes * 13 refers)*

On the 28 April the Farms Estate Committee resolved to undertake a tenants' survey to better understand the use of neonicotinoids on the County Farms Estate and to explore potential positive opportunities to address pollination issues on the County Farms Estate through the Pollinators Action Plan in line with the objectives of the Farms Estate Strategic Review. The outcome of the tenants' survey undertaken in line with the previous decision of

the County Farms Estate Committee was considered by that Committee on 28 June 2016 (as set out in Report BSS/16/11) in determining its response to Cabinet. The Minutes of that meeting and the aforementioned Report are also before the Cabinet at this meeting, to which Members should have regard in considering this Report.

3. Proposal

The Pollinators' Action Plan has been produced as per recommendation (a) of the Scrutiny Committee. With respect to Scrutiny recommendations (b) and (c) the Plan incorporates recommendations of the Farms Estate Committee and of relevant lead officers across the Council. The Plan sets out how the Council is already taking, and will take further, positive action for pollinators' whilst carrying out its functions.

4. Consultations/Representations/Technical data

The County Farms tenants' questionnaire was developed in consultation with the NFU, Friends of the Earth and FWAG SW. A representative of the NFU addressed the County Farms Committee on 28 June. The views and opinions of the Devon Federation of Young Farmers Clubs and the Estate Tenants Association were represented on the County Farms Estate Committee. No other parties were consulted by the Committee.

On 12 April the Leader of the Council was presented with a petition organised by The Friends of the Earth's '*Bee Cause Campaign*', containing in the region of 3750 signatures of Devon residents, congratulating the Council in agreeing to consider taking action to reduce the impact of neonicotinoids upon bees and other pollinators.

The CEO of the Devon Wildlife Trust spoke at the 7 March Scrutiny Committee.

There has been no formal external consultation undertaken by DCC in relation to its approach to pollinators and neonicotinoids. However, there has been some informal discussion with a range of organisations and other local authorities to gather information to inform this Authority's consideration of the issue and the production of a Pollinators' Action Plan.

The proposed Pollinator's Action Plan was developed through internal consultation with Council officers from highways, country parks, grounds maintenance, planning and environment and with staff from NPS.

5. Financial Considerations

The majority of the actions within the Pollinators' Plan are already being undertaken and will have no new financial implications for Council budgets.

Officers are exploring opportunities for external funding for improved management of roadside verges, which will be of benefit to pollinators.

6. Environmental Considerations

The recommendations and the resulting implementation of the Action Plan will benefit Devon's natural environment by improving the situation for pollinators.

7. Equality Considerations

There are no equality issues arising from the recommendation.

8. Legal Considerations

There are no legal issues arising from the recommendation.

Note that there is currently a partial EC precautionary ban on the three most common neonicotinoid pesticides (clothinidin, imidacloprid and thiamethocam). The UK government has implemented this ban.

It should also be noted that the Council, as landlord, is unable to alter the terms of existing Farm Business Tenancy Agreements or existing Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 tenancy agreements, so cannot currently impose a ban on the use of neonicotinoids by these tenants, unless this is done by mutual agreement.

9. Risk Management Considerations

The proposed approach set out in the Action Plan balances the potential risks to pollinators linked to the use of neonicotinoids, the statutory duties of the Council and the rights of its tenants. This is done in the context of the very limited use of neonicotinoids on the Farms Estate and the fact that insecticides are only used on remaining Council property in exceptional circumstances for health and safety reasons.

10. Public Health Impacts

There are no public health impacts arising from the recommendations.

11. Options/Alternatives

The Place Scrutiny Committee recommended that all necessary steps, where possible, be taken to prohibit the use of neonicotinoids on land under the control or ownership of DCC. However, such action would appear to be unnecessary and irrelevant on most parts of the DCC estate, given that there is no routine use of such insecticides. Nor is it practical on the County Farms Estate given the limited used and legal constraints outlined in Section 8. Instead, a series of actions to further reduce the use of neonicotinoids by County Farms Estate tenants, along with other positive measures in support of pollinators, are proposed by the Action Plan.

12. Reasons for Recommendation

The author has prepared this report in accordance with the recommendations of the Farms Estate Committee and taking account of the recommendations of Place Scrutiny Committee, consultations with lead officers across the Council and the requirement to take forward Cabinet recommendations.

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Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Community and Environmental Services: Councillor Roger Croad

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Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
None		

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Devon County Council

Draft Pollinators' Action Plan

2016 – 2021



Photo credit: Mike Deaton

Introduction from Councillor Roger Croad, Cabinet Member for Community and Environmental Services



Bees, and other pollinators, are essential to food production and therefore to our lives. We are all now very aware that the bee population has been declining at an alarming rate in recent years due to a range of factors and that we must all work together to reverse this decline.

Devon County Council's commitment to protecting and enhancing the natural environment is set out in our Environmental Policy which was adopted in May 2011. As part of this commitment we have a key role to play in helping our pollinators. In terms of direct land management the Council's estate includes farms, roadside verges, Country Parks and the grounds of our offices. As a local planning authority we are responsible for writing and implementing planning policies to protect and enhance pollinator habitats and species. As a strategic authority we can play a key

role in encouraging and supporting organisations and communities to take action for pollinators.

Pollinators need our help and I am therefore delighted that we have produced this Pollinators' Action Plan which sets out how we are, and will, help Devon's pollinators.

Why are pollinators so important and what are the issues?

There are over 1,500 species of insect pollinators in the UK, including bumble bees, honey bees, solitary bees, hoverflies, wasps, flies, beetles, butterflies and moths. All have complex life cycles and specific needs, including food in the form of pollen and nectar and somewhere to shelter and build a nest.

The South West of Britain is nationally important for rare species of pollinators due to our combination of climate and habitat diversity. The soft cliffs of South Devon are particularly important and home to very rare species such as the long-horned mining bee. Devon is also home to very rare butterflies such as heath and marsh fritillaries.

We all rely on pollinators for food production. Nationally the cost of replacing pollination services provided by bees alone is thought to be over £1.8 billion a year.

However bee numbers are declining, not just in the UK but worldwide. In 2012 DEFRA outlined the severity of the decline of, and threat to, bees: *There has been a severe decline in the diversity of wild bees in the countryside...England has the greatest decline of anywhere in Europe. Since 1900, the UK has lost 20 species of bees. A further 35 bee species are considered to be under threat of extinction.*

Causes of the decline are complex but include disease, climate change, habitat loss and pesticide use. The Council will, in monitoring and updating this plan, take into account new research relating to the causes of declines.



The National Pollinator Strategy

In November 2014, the UK Government produced its National Pollinator Strategy in response to public and political concern about the decline in bees and other pollinating insects (see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-pollinator-strategy-for-bees-and-other-pollinators-in-england>). The strategy sets

out a ten year plan. As part of this the government set up a Bees' Needs website with advice on how to help pollinators. See <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/bees-needs>



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.



The Devon Pollinator Pledge

In 2016 Devon Local Nature Partnership launched the Devon Pollinator Pledge to encourage everyone to take action for Devon's pollinators. See <http://www.naturaldevon.org.uk/>. The pledge includes five actions:

1. **Plant bee-friendly flowers.** Flowers (including on shrubs and trees) provide nectar and pollen throughout the year.
2. **Create and protect meadows and other areas rich in wild flowers.** In gardens sow an area with wild flower seed; leave it to flower and set seed before cutting.
3. **Don't be too tidy.** Leave wild corners, dead wood, walls and grassy banks undisturbed over winter to provide shelter. Leave an area to grow wild and build a 'bug hotel' in your garden.
4. **Think carefully about whether to use pesticides** especially where pollinators are active or nesting or where plants are in flower. Only use pesticides if absolutely necessary.
5. **Join up and learn more.** Support one of the many conservation organisations campaigning for, and conserving, our wild pollinators in Devon.



Devon County Council was the first organisation to sign the Devon Pollinator Pledge and this Action Plan sets out how the Council is working to help pollinators.

Action Plan

A The County Council Estate

A1 County Farms Estate

Devon County Council owns 69 farms covering 3892 hectares. Approximately 80% of the Estate is grassland. The remainder is largely wheat, barley, maize and winter forage crops. The Estate aims to provide people with a way into farming with a view that, within a reasonable timeframe, they secure an independent livelihood from agriculture. All farms are let by Farm Business Tenancy Agreements under the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995.



Pollinators are important for agriculture but agriculture is also important for providing pollinator habitat across our countryside. Crops provide food for pollinating insects but only over a short period of time and so other food sources from flowers in hedges, margins, grasslands and woodlands are needed for the rest of the year. Breeding and overwintering habitats such as grassland, hedge banks, ditches, pools, dung-rich pasture and bare ground are also vital.

Actions

1. Tenants are encouraged to sign up to the Devon Pollinators Pledge.
2. Identify and promote and/or develop new best practice case studies demonstrating how the Estate is used to support pollinators.
3. Identify and promote training opportunities for tenants around alternative means of pest control such as Integrated Pest Management Plans.
4. Identify and promote the use of alternative non neonicotinoid pesticides used on maize, wheat,
5. Barley and winter forage crops (noting that a survey has shown that there is currently very limited use of neonicotinoids on the Estate).
6. Promote voluntary measures to tenants such as those set out in the Campaign for the Farmed Environment.
7. Identify County Farms more likely to be eligible for the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and discuss the merits of an application with the tenants.
8. Identify and encourage positive management of County Wildlife Sites on the Estate.
9. Include recommendations for pollinators in the environmental review which is undertaken when County Farms are re-let.

Examples of Campaign for the Farmed Environment Voluntary Measures:

- Manage hedges on a two or three year rotation.
- Plant trees where appropriate.
- Leave cereal headland unsprayed and/or unfertilised.
- Uncultivated field corners create habitat for pollinators.
- Provide a legume and herb rich temporary grass to provide enhanced food supplies and habitat.
- Provide fertiliser free permanent pasture.
- Create a beetle bank – grass mounds that run through the middle of large fields.
- Sow a wildflower or a pollen and nectar mix to provide food and energy.

A2 The highways network

The Council is responsible for 13,000 kms of roads (this excludes all the motorway and trunk roads which are managed by Highways England, and roads in Plymouth and Torbay) as well as public rights of way and cycleways. This network includes nearly 2000 hectares of highway verge.



Devon's verges (with adjacent habitats such as hedges, trees and ditches) provide habitat of huge value to pollinators. According to Plantlife verges across the UK are home to over 700 species, 45% of our native flora. 87 of these species are under threat. Many of Devon's verges are full of wildflowers such as bluebells, red campion, stitchwort, ox-eye daisy, violets and early purple orchids. These flowers are appreciated by both pollinators and people! Verges of exceptional wildlife value in Devon are designated, by the Council, as 'special verges'.

The Council has a duty to maintain the highway network so that it is safe to use and has a programme to ensure that vegetation and trees do not cause an obstruction to the highway or threaten the safety of users. As part of this the Council carries out grass-cutting on verges that are essential to maintaining visibility, such as at junctions, laybys and the inside of bends. Hedge management is the responsibility of the adjacent landowner. The Council does however cut some hedges in visibility areas. The Council is also encouraging communities to work together to manage verges via the Highways Community Road Warden and Self-Help Scheme. More information on this can be found at

<https://new.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/maintaining-roads/trees-and-vegetation/grass-cutting/>.

[The Council has a highways weed control / clearance policy which ensures that weed control only takes places where essential to prevent damage and obstruction to the highway network e.g. controlling growth on carriageways and in drains. The Council and its contractors do not use insecticides during routine highways functions.](#)

Actions

1. Integrate wildlife guidance into the information pack for Community Road Wardens and the Self-Help Scheme in order to help communities manage verges for pollinators.
2. Continue to apply the Council's weed control / clearance policy.
3. Continue to provide highways hedgerow management advice for landowners via the Council's website.
4. Extend the use of the Council's Environmental Appraisal toolkit to highways maintenance projects and activities.

A3 Country Parks and other countryside sites

Devon County Council is responsible for two Country Parks (Stover near Newton Abbot and the Grand Western Canal near Tiverton) as well as a number of smaller sites such as Knapp Copse Local Nature Reserve in East Devon. In addition to being valuable for wildlife these parks are an important countryside recreational resource for local residents and visitors. The Council has an ongoing commitment to improve the environment at these Parks. Note that the majority of parks and public open spaces across Devon are managed by District and Town Councils.



Actions

1. To continue to manage the Country Parks for wildlife, including pollinators.
2. To continue to promote understanding of wildlife, including pollinators, through running activities and events.

A4 Grounds maintenance

Devon County Council owns or leases a number of properties across Devon some of which have gardens and/or small areas of green space. The most significant of these is County Hall in Exeter. There is no routine use of insecticides through the Council's grounds maintenance programme. Insecticides are only used in exceptional circumstances e.g. controlling wasps nests for health and safety purposes.



Actions

1. Increase the value of our grounds for pollinators where appropriate e.g. plant bee friendly plants, manage hedges for wildlife, leave wild corners and dead wood.

B The County Council's planning functions

Devon County Council is the Minerals and Waste Planning Authority for most of Devon. The Council is responsible for determining planning applications relating to minerals and waste development as well as those relating to the Council's own functions e.g. roads and schools. Note that planning applications for residential development and business needs are dealt with by local district, borough and city councils. Plymouth City Council, Torbay Council and the two National Parks are responsible for all planning applications in their areas.



Devon County Council is also responsible for minerals and waste planning in Devon. The Devon Waste Plan was adopted in 2014. The Devon Minerals Plan will be adopted in 2017. Both plans contain policies to protect and enhance pollinator habitat and species in line with national planning policy guidance and achieve a net gain for wildlife proportionate to the nature and scale of the proposal.

Actions

1. Implement planning policy to protect and enhance pollinator habitat and species. Where appropriate work with developers to ensure net gain for pollinators.
2. Continue to ensure that planning officers have access to in-house ecological expertise and up to date ecological data from Devon Biodiversity Records Centre.

C Community Leadership

There's lots of great work going on across Devon to improve the situation for pollinators. Devon's farmers are managing meadows, field margins and hedges. More and more people are managing their gardens for insects. Partnership projects which are benefitting Devon's pollinators include:

Blackdown Hills AONB's Natural Futures Project

Devon Wildlife Trust and Exeter City Council's Exeter Wild City Project

Buglife's Torbay's Buzzing Project and South Devon B-Lines Project

Devon Wildlife Trust's Northern Devon Nature Improvement Area

The Dartmoor Meadows Project

As a strategic authority covering the county of Devon the Council has a key role in encouraging and supporting others to carry out actions which will benefit pollinators, including communities.

Actions

1. Continue to support the Local Nature Partnership's Pollinators' campaign through providing the Partnership's secretariat which oversees this work.
2. Through our engagement in a wide range of other environmental partnerships, especially those for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the North Devon Biosphere Reserve, support new projects and activities which benefit pollinators.
3. Encourage and support community groups and businesses to help pollinators e.g. through libraries, schools, youth groups and parishes.