KINGSTON ST MARY PARISH COUNCIL

BIODIVERSITY POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 there is a duty on public authorities in England, including Parish Councils, to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of their policy or decision making.

This was further strengthened by Section 102 of the Environment Act 2021 and public authorities, including Parish Councils, must now consider what action they can take to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England.

This means a public authority must:

- consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity;
- agree policies and specific objectives based on their consideration;
- act to deliver policies and achieve objectives.

Parish Councils are not obliged to publish a report on their actions but they must agree policies and objectives and can spend funds to conserve biodiversity.

DEFINITION

According to the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (Defra), biodiversity is the variety of all life on Earth. It includes all species of animals and plants – everything that is alive on our planet. Biodiversity is everywhere, in gardens, fields, hedgerows, mountains rivers and the sea.

Biodiversity is important for its own sake and has its own intrinsic value. A number of studies have shown this value also goes further. Biodiversity is the building block of our 'ecosystems' that in turn provide us with a wide range of goods and services that support our economic and social wellbeing. These include essentials such as food, fresh water and clean air, but also less obvious services such as protection from natural disasters, regulation of our climate, and purification of our water or pollination of our crops. Biodiversity also provides important cultural services, enriching our lives.

THE LOCAL AREA

Kingston St Mary is a Parish and Village in Somerset, England, situated at the southern end of the Quantock Hills, some 4 miles (6.4km) north of Taunton. The Parish is located in an area which transitions from a low vale in the south to a high vale in the north, part of which is within the Quantock Hills Natural Landscape. (QHNL).

Kingston St Mary Village is the main settlement in the Parish, nestled at the foot of the Quantock Hills, straddling the boundary between the high vale to the north and the low vale to the south. The northern part of the Village is within the QHNL and the majority of the Village is within a conservation area. The centre of the Village has changed little over the past 200 years, where there remains a sense of timeliness.

The hamlets of Nailsbourne, Dodhill, Yarford, Fulford, Pickney and Edgeborough are physically separate from each other and Taunton and are architecturally distinct from Kingston St Mary Village, being more rural in nature. Throughout the Parish there is a strong rural character, with a mixed land use of animal and arable farming and a number of natural features, including combes, hills, streams, woodland, hedges, ditches and farmland. In addition, the Tetton Estate is a historic grade II* listed House and Terrace, with grounds resembling a parkland, which incorporates a working farm for grazing cattle and sheep.

PARISH COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES

The Parish Council is responsible for maintaining the village green and is the trustee for managing Kingston St Mary's recreation ground.

The Parish Council is also a statutory consultee on all planning applications within the Parish. Any views expressed by the Parish Council will be taken into account by the Local Planning Authority before a decision is made, providing the points made are relevant to the determination of a planning application.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The object of this policy is to work towards conserving, enhancing and protecting the biodiversity of Kingston St Mary Parish.

The Parish Council will consider sustainability, environmental impact and biodiversity when making decisions and will develop and implement policies and strategies as required. In particular, the Parish Council will aim to improve the biodiversity of the Parish in the following ways:

- consider the potential impact on biodiversity represented by planning applications;
- manage its land and property using environmentally friendly practices that will promote biodiversity;
- support local businesses and Parish Council operations in the adoption of low impact / nature positive practices;
- encourage and support other organisations within the Parish to manage their areas of responsibility with biodiversity in mind;
- support residents and local organisation activities to enhance and promote biodiversity.

ACTIONS

Planning Applications

The Parish Council will:

- when commenting on planning applications, support site and building design that benefits biodiversity through the conservation and integration of existing habitats or provision of new habitats;
- support protection of sensitive habitats from development and will consider whether the development would mean the loss of important habitats for wildlife in respect of all planning applications;
- consider what each proposed development might make in terms of biodiversity net gain;
- include policies in support of biodiversity within the neighbourhood plan.

Land and Property Management

The Parish Council will:

- carry out a biodiversity audit of its landholdings;
- consider the conservation and promotion of local biodiversity with regard to the management of its open spaces. This will include adopting beneficial practices with regarding to cutting and removal of vegetation, application of chemicals and timing of maintenance work, whilst paying attention to the Government's regulations for plant protection products;



- take special care in the specification of grounds maintenance contracts to ensure that the work, whilst reaching acceptable standards, does not harm the natural environment;
- source sustainable materials when procuring supplies for Parish Council use;
- consider biodiversity issues and the implementation of changes when managing its buildings.

Local Community

The Parish Council will:

- raise public awareness of biodiversity issues, including through its website and newsletters;
- engage with local businesses and residents regarding biodiversity in the community and how members of the community can assist and make a difference;
- where feasible, involve the community in biodiversity projects on its land including for example tree planting, wildflower meadows, birdbox making, etc..

Partners

The Parish Council will work in partnership with other organisations to protect, promote and enhance biodiversity within the Parish.

It will review any local nature recovery strategies, species conservation strategies, or protected site strategies in respect of local Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and consider how it may become more involved in implementing the strategies' recommendations.

MONITORING & REVIEW

This policy was adopted on 12th March 2024 and will be reviewed annually in May, when a summary of how the policy has been implemented will be reported to show progress towards conserving, enhancing and protecting the biodiversity of Kingston St Mary Parish.