

# STONESFIELD PARISH COUNCIL BIODIVERSITY POLICY and ACTION PLANS



## 1. Introduction

Under 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 the Environment Act 2021 so public authorities must now consider what they can do 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.

## 2. Definition

According to DEFRA (Biodiversity 2020), biodiversity is the variety of all life on earth. It includes all species of animals and plants, and their habitats. 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 through our engagement with nature.

## 3. The local area

Stonesfield Parish Council is a rural village, within the Cotswolds National Landscape, with a considerable number of natural areas, including hedges, ditches, farmland, and a stretch of the River Evenlode.

## 4. Parish Council responsibilities

The Parish Council owns Stonesfield Common, SSSI.

The Parish Council manages the grass cutting in certain areas of the village. **Appendix 2 - Map**

## 5. Aims and Objectives

This policy aims to conserve and enhance biodiversity within the area for which Stonesfield Parish Council is responsible. It aligns with the guiding principles on biodiversity and green spaces set out in the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan and supports the objectives of the West Oxfordshire District Council Biodiversity Action Plan 2023–2030.

In particular, the policy has regard to **Policy SEL6** and **Section 9.5 (Biodiversity and trees)** of the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan, which together provide the local planning framework for protecting, enhancing and connecting habitats, trees and biodiversity across the parish.

Further detail on Policy SEL6 and Section 9.5 (Biodiversity and trees) of the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan is provided in **Appendix 3 and Appendix 4**.

## **6. Actions**

Stonesfield Parish Council will aim to improve the biodiversity of the area in the following ways:

### **Planning**

- Consider the impact on biodiversity in the decisions made through the Parish Council, especially 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 applications. They will consider what each proposed development might make in terms of biodiversity net gain.

### **Land and property management**

- Manage its land and property using environmentally friendly practices that will promote biodiversity. This will include adopting beneficial practices with regarding to cutting and removal of vegetation, reducing the application of chemicals, and timing of maintenance work, paying attention to the Government's regulations for plant protection products.
- Work with the County Council on verge management, favouring biodiversity but noting which areas may need cutting for highway safety;
- Take 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, wherever possible, when procuring supplies for the Council's use;
- Consider biodiversity issues when managing physical infrastructure

### **Local community**

- Support residents in enhancing and promoting biodiversity.
- Aim to raise public awareness of biodiversity issues through its website and other communications.
- Raise awareness of the importance of gardens as habitats for wildlife.
- Where feasible, involve the community in biodiversity projects, including, for example, tree planting, wildflower areas, birdbox making.
- Encourage local businesses to adopt low impact/nature positive environmental practices.

### **Partners**

- Work in partnership with other organisations, as appropriate, to protect and enhance biodiversity, and promote nature recovery strategies within the local area.
- Encourage other organisations within the parish to manage their areas of responsibility with biodiversity in mind.

## **7. Monitoring and Review**

This policy was adopted on *6 May 2026* and will be reviewed in two years or sooner should legislation dictate. An action plan will be developed over the coming year and a summary of how the policy has been implemented will be reported annually to show progress against that action plan.

# Biodiversity Action Plans for Stonesfield Parish

The Parish Council invited village organisations with a responsibility for managing property and land, however small, to contribute individual action plans. These are outlined below. The aim is to raise awareness of threats to plants and wildlife, and the role that everyone can play in enhancing biodiversity.

Organisations who responded:

1. Churchfields Allotment Association
2. St James the Great
3. Stonesfield Environmental Group (including Stonesfield tree planters)
4. Stonesfield Common Volunteers
5. Stonesfield Gardening Club
6. Stonesfield Methodist Church
7. Stonesfield Owl and Bird of Prey Rescue
8. Stonesfield Playing Field Association
9. Stonesfield Primary School/Forest School
10. Stonesfield Swifts
11. Stonesfield Tennis Club
12. Stonesfield Village Hall
13. William Buckland Management Company

## **1. Churchfields Allotment Association**

Allotment holders have agreed to have a maximum of 25% of their allotment for flowers (wild or otherwise) ponds or fallow land, minimal use of chemicals, no peat in use, and encourage and have increasing numbers of members using no dig and organic practices. We have a mature ivy hedge just over 100 yards long that is not pruned and has tremendous wildlife each autumn. Future aims include developing agreement to have the allotments chemical free.

## **2. St James the Great**

We have a theological commitment to the stewardship of nature. We will continue to maintain two churchyards and the church as places for people and nature.

## **3. Stonesfield Environmental Group (including Stonesfield tree planters)**

River Evenlode: we are currently working on a campaign to clean up the river. Volunteers are involved with testing the Evenlode for levels of nitrates and phosphates, and sampling the river fly populations.

Glebe land, off Brook Lane: we are working with Wild Oxfordshire and The Oxfordshire Environment Trust to develop a 5-year management plan, focused on enhancing and promoting the habitat and increasing biodiversity on the limestone meadow. We will also manage for glow worms, involve the forest school to put in two 'bug hotels'. We will monitor the flora, glow worms (male and female) moths, butterflies, insects to get a base line and monitor for change. We will have an information board and the work will be done by volunteers.

Community orchard: we will plant trees either later this year or next autumn/winter on a site within the new rectory land.

Stonesfield tree planters will continue to plant native trees appropriately around the surrounding area. To date they have planted just over 1520 trees in the previous two years. STP will continue to plant a tree for everyone in the village, 1575. In addition, the village has sponsored 1600 forest trees in Madagascar. The forest school have planted 30 two-year-old wych elms in Stockey Bottom grown from a Wych elm in Stockey Bottom (kind permission from Blenheim).

We aim to engage and inform the village through articles in the slate, over 100 volunteers over the last 3 years, and organising and raising funds for the National Landscape stone on the Stonesfield Straight.

#### **4. Stonesfield Common Volunteers**

As a group of volunteers working for Stonesfield Parish Council, we operate within the Natural England Management Agreement for the SSSI site of Stonesfield Common, and any policies or plans the PC might have in addition. The majority of the work we do is maintaining the unimproved limestone grassland for which the Common is designated. Cattle grazing in the winter is the main grassland management tool, but the Common is subject to a number of invasive species. Blackthorn and hawthorn are the main scrub species that are spreading across the Common and NE require us to keep that within 5-10% of ground cover. Blackthorn is the most pernicious of scrub species spreading by runners. The other main invasive species is tor grass (*Brachypodium pinnatum*). This out-competes many of the native grass species and when it dies back every winter forms a dense matt that other floral species find it difficult to get through. Cattle prefer not to eat this grass, so we spend a lot of time brush cutting and raking away all the cut material to ensure the soil isn't enriched.

We undertake maintenance of the fencing to ensure that the Common is stock proof.

We have started an association with BSG Ecology who have now surveyed the flora on more than 20 1xmeter square sites across the Common forming a valuable record of the flora. This is an important database that we can compare against each year to evaluate change. The Wychwood Flora Group also survey and protect the legally protected Meadow clary annually.

We have planted a number of alder trees along the river bank. We need to work with the PC regarding pollarding of the willows.

#### **5. Stonesfield Gardening Club**

We are mindful of the impact of gardening on biodiversity when we arrange our talks. Since 2018 we have had talks on related subjects several times each year. Subjects include gardening for butterflies, wildlife and pollinators, composting, no-dig gardening, gardening in a changing climate, biodiversity in the garden and wildflowers on the Common. We have also had visits from Wychwood Forest Trust, Bridewell Garden, Farmland Bird Aid Network and Paul Wren, who is working to introduce more swift boxes to the village. We encourage all our members to use peat-free compost and arrange an organic compost delivery each year. We financially support the local charity Chrissie's Owls which cares for wildlife in need.

We manage the White Horse Community Pub garden and have introduced nature-friendly plants there. Members are also responsible for the upkeep of the War Memorial garden. We have a visit next year from the environment officer of Blenheim, talking to us about bees in the estate.

## **6. Stonesfield Methodist Church**

The Northampton Methodist District of which we are a part has recently adopted an environmental policy which will encourage Circuits and Churches to look at environmental issues in their work and planning. This is available to read here <https://www.northamptonmethodistdistrict.org.uk/lib/F860911.pdf>

## **7. Stonesfield Owl and Bird of Prey Rescue**

We install owl and kestrel nest boxes. Future aims include: Education of farmers, landowners and the general public and distribution of leaflets. We must provide habitat for all of our owls and birds of prey. We should encourage people to stop using rodenticide which is causing secondary poisoning in all birds of prey especially barn owls.

## **8. Stonesfield Playing Field Association**

The playing fields are dedicated to the playing of organised sports and managed as such with regular and frequent grass cutting and annual application of grass seed and fertiliser. The surrounding hedges and trees are left largely untended. There are no plans to change the management of the playing field as a facility for organised sports but equally no plans to significantly alter the perimeter hedges and trees.

## **9. Stonesfield Primary School/Forest School**

Our Forest School provision has had a Sustainability Policy in place since 2016 as well as accompanying on-going Ecological Impact Assessments and a Site Management Plan, all of which work together to enhance the biodiversity of our site and to minimise and mitigate the human impact of our activities. Policies and plans have involved and continue to involve: planting native "high insect value" trees, shrubs and wild flowers, creating wildlife habitats and wildlife corridors e.g. hedgehog tunnels, dead hedge, wildlife-friendly pond surrounds, making use of leaf mulch on site, enhancing the pond for biodiversity, creating a wildflower meadow and leaving small areas unmown, spreading woodchip to avoid soil compaction, etc. While the school doesn't have its own biodiversity/sustainability plan, much of the Forest School policies spill over into the wider maintenance of the school grounds and some grounds decisions are made in consultation with the Forest School Leader/children at school. And vice versa, often the Forest School Leader will make requests/suggestions, in consultation with the children and leadership team, as to how part of the school land may be developed and maintained for greater biodiversity.

Future aims include:

1. Further tree planting: planting for natural succession, for improved biodiversity and climate change mitigation, as well as for greater educational and social benefits including the physical and mental health benefits of working and studying in a greener environment.
2. Increasing and improving the wild flower meadow and leaving further small areas of the grounds unmown.
3. Creating further habitats, e.g. slowworm home, bird/bat boxes, etc.

## **10. Stonesfield Village Hall**

We have 'Greenification' plans to be instigated at the village hall. We are open to ideas and suggestions for more biodiversity actions.

## **11. Stonesfield Swifts**

We fit swift boxes and swifts bricks when requested. Our aim is to educate about and maintain natural nest sites and promote swifts generally.

## **12. Stonesfield Tennis Club**

The banks at the side and back of the courts have been planted with trees and herbs and are largely left to their own devices apart from periodic efforts to cut back bramble and blackthorn that would otherwise engulf the area. We are planning to install floodlighting on the courts but it has been designed to minimise adverse impacts on wildlife. As part of the planning application for lights we commissioned a wildlife survey.

## **13. William Buckland Management Company**

The green areas at William Buckland Way (Charity Farm) are owned by the shareholders (most of whom are residents) who each have a share. It is managed by William Buckland Management Company on behalf of shareholders and is private land which it is used for recreation by the residents.

The site has the following:

- Planting and maintenance of native trees to improve fauna, soil nutrients and shelter.
- Swales to avoid flooding
- SUDs system on site with porous surfaces and water storage underground to reduce surface run off.
- Planting of fruit trees and hedging for nesting and food resource.
- Removal of grass cuttings has been reviewed in line with our Landscape Management Plan to allow cuttings to remain on the limestone brash which gets very dry and parched in summer. It is a nutrient poor soil.

Residents are encouraged to enhance their gardens and most have planted a range of flora. The site was devoid of wildlife for a number of years during and after construction but increasingly there are squirrels, kites, slow worms, toads, great crested newts and grass snakes coming onto site. Grasshoppers thrive. We still have pigeons which for some reason like to sit on the fences but also bees, butterflies. We have pheasants, blue tits, goldfinch, sparrows, thrush, woodpecker, partridge, greenfinch, chaffinch, pied wagtail, robin, swift, blackbird, magpie, owl, bat, and others. We are also finding some field mushrooms. As we share a boundary with the managed Blenheim Field, there are also field mice, crows, kestrel and the occasional deer visible.

We are facing the challenge of pet owners using the area for exercise, and the consequences are the darker and more vigorous tufts of grass enriched with nitrogen. Our landscape plan is to try to improve the overall growth of grass and have decided to ensure the grass is cut on a more regular basis as dominant weeds became very invasive. The consensus of our residents is the wish to have short grass for children to play.

### **Further actions suggested for consideration**

1. Create a chain of ponds – identify funding that could help people put ponds in their back gardens.

2. Undertake a survey of local wildlife species such as plants, hedgehogs, glowworms, butterflies, so that we have a local data base that builds year on year.
3. Develop a plan for roadside verges to enhance wildflowers.
4. Develop a plan for hedge trimming, and manage hedgerows (cutting and hedgelaying) to support wildlife.
5. Stop the wood gleaning out of stocky bottom (install a gate to stop vehicles loading up).
6. Protect the SSSIs.
7. Inform and support biodiversity education for all.
8. Encourage landowners to remove Dead Mans Beard, cut back brambles and cow parsley which are very invasive, dominant and do not allow the smaller plants to grow. Encourage landowners to manage the growth of ivy where necessary (e.g. old trees that may be affected by wind), whilst recognising its benefits to wildlife, see <https://www.rhs.org.uk/weeds/ivy-on-trees-ground-cover-weed>
9. Remove plants that are growing in road kerbsides as they are blocking drains and causing damage.
10. Put up bird boxes on Parish-owned property.
11. Consider making a wildflower patch near the cricket area.
12. Encourage organic farming.
13. Prevent sewage discharge.
14. Encouraging residents to be environmentally aware in the management of their gardens, and consider insect-friendly plants.
15. Manage the Stonesfield Straight for greater plant diversity.
16. Develop a biodiversity plan for the village.
17. Create a map of how the green area at school might link up and provide greater biodiversity links with the wider green spaces around us.
18. Consider ways the primary school can support the wider education of the village, to understand the importance of what the school and other environmental ventures are trying to achieve.
19. Create a "who's who" list of village "experts, who can support on particular projects. e.g. We'd like to put up bird boxes we've been given, who can advise us on this?
20. Encourage any new build or extensions to have a Swift brick fitted into the build if there a suitable site for it. They are not expensive and it's simple to do.
21. Review the use of herbicides and insecticides, and reduce use.

## Appendix 1

### Conserving and enhancing the natural environment: Overview (Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan)

9.1.1 Stonesfield is the first settlement within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now also referred to as the Cotswolds National Landscape) after crossing the AONB boundary on the approach from Woodstock. It therefore contributes crucially to the first impressions of the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB gained on entry.

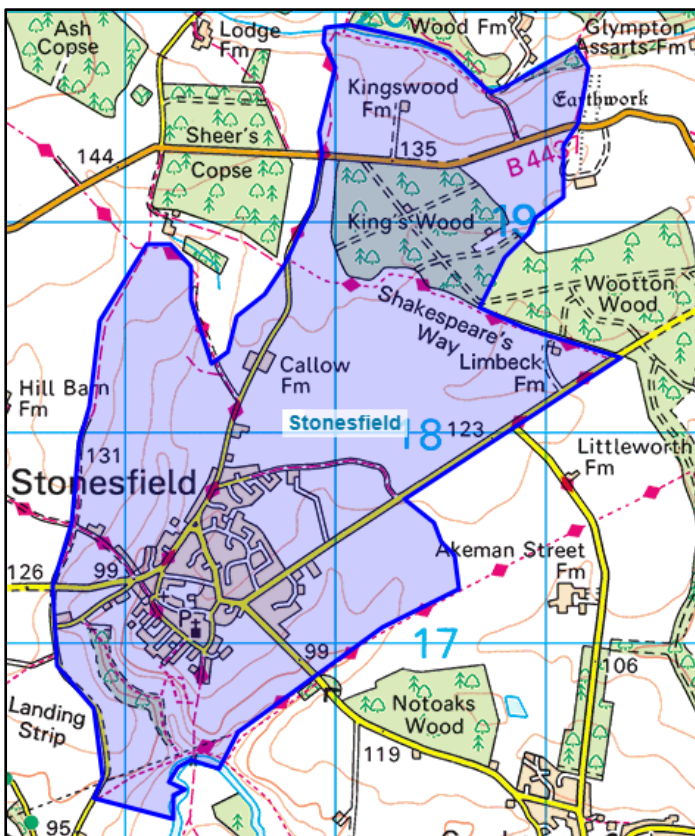
9.1.2 Protecting views and the Landscape is important to residents. Many Stonesfield's residents enjoy the beauty of walks through Stockey Bottom woods with bluebells in Spring; Stonesfield Common (SSSI) with a diversity of flowers and butterflies in summer, and views over the Evenlode; the Oxfordshire Way and ridgeline to the west of the parish, with views across Ruddywell; and the open pastoral views to the north of the village. The opportunity to live in beautiful countryside is highly rated by residents.

9.1.3. Stonesfield's green spaces are varied and well-used, whether for children's play, sports, growing food (allotments) or for general enjoyment of open air and the beauty of hedgerows, trees and wildlife. The network of public footpaths is well used, and extensible for more active travel.

9.1.4. Stonesfield is home to a number of legally protected and notable species (e.g. farmland birds, whose populations are in decline, glow worms, and rare protected meadow clary) as well as important habitats (Stonesfield Common, Bottoms and Banks Site SSSI). There are opportunities for green spaces/wildlife sites to be better, bigger, more and joined up (as set out in the Cotswolds Management Plan for improving biodiversity) along three main Blue/green corridors.

9.1.5. Poor water quality due to sewerage pollution of the River Evenlode is a major concern to residents, the banks of which are well used by picnickers in summer. Surface water drainage is an issue rather than flood risk.

9.1.6. Stonesfield is a dark skies settlement, and has one of the lowest levels of light pollution in the Cotswolds, allowing stars to be seen at night, and avoiding negative impacts on people and wildlife.





## Appendix 3

### Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan: Policy SEL6 (Summary)

The Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan includes Policy SEL6, which forms part of the planning framework for conserving and enhancing the natural environment within the parish.

Policy SEL6 supports development that:

Protects and enhances biodiversity and valued habitats;

Conserves existing trees, hedgerows, green spaces and landscape features;

Avoids the loss or fragmentation of habitats where possible;

Incorporates measures to enhance biodiversity and ecological connectivity; and

Aligns with objectives for landscape protection within the Cotswolds National Landscape.

The policy requires consideration of potential impacts on biodiversity and encourages development that delivers positive outcomes for nature.

This Biodiversity Policy supports the intent and application of Policy SEL6 through proactive land management, policy alignment and community engagement.

## Appendix 4

### Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan: Section 9.5 (Biodiversity and Trees) (Summary)

Section 9.5 of the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan, titled “Biodiversity and trees”, sets out the local context and priorities for protecting and enhancing biodiversity within Stonesfield.

The section highlights:

The importance of Stonesfield’s biodiversity, including protected sites, habitats and species;

The role of trees, hedgerows and green corridors in supporting wildlife and landscape character;

The need to enhance, restore and connect habitats;

The importance of appropriate tree protection, planting and long-term management; and

The value of monitoring, education and community involvement.

This Biodiversity Policy has been developed to complement and support the objectives of Section 9.5 through practical action, partnerships and community-led initiatives.