

Burwell Biodiversity Action Plan

Introduction and background

The *Living Planet Index* report published in 2024 reveals that studied wildlife populations worldwide have seen an average decline of 73% from 1970 through to 2020.¹

In the UK, The *State of Nature report 2023*² confirmed that wildlife is continuing to decline. Already classified as one of the world's most nature-depleted countries, nearly one in six of the more than ten thousand species assessed (16%) are at risk of extinction in the UK.

In England, wildlife has declined in abundance by 32% on average since 1970. Plant species in particular have decreased in distribution by 68%.³ Common English bird species have declined on average by 16%, and within this group farmland birds have suffered particularly strong declines of on average 59%.

In 2023, *Buglife* reported a staggering 78% decrease in the number of insects sampled on vehicle number plates between 2004 and 2023. These findings are consistent with research which has widely reported declining trends in insect populations globally.⁴

2024 saw a record low for the number of butterflies counted by citizen scientists - and 80% of butterflies have declined in abundance or distribution since 1976. We may be the last generation to enjoy butterflies and moths in abundance.⁵

Intensive management of agricultural land, climate change and habitat loss are the main factors causing these shocking declines.

Cambridgeshire is one of the most nature-depleted areas in England.⁶

So what is happening in Burwell? Casual observations by longer term residents in Burwell confirm the gradual reduction in insect abundance, wild flowers and birdsong over past decades.

We cannot look away or hope that someone else will solve the problem. Humans are part of nature and cannot survive without a thriving ecosystem. This plan outlines what, why, where, who and how we can all take action to bring about positive change.

The first section of this plan is about the village as a whole, where the Parish Council is just one of the many bodies and organisations working together to inform and encourage residents to play their part in protecting and encouraging biodiversity.

The second section covers the Parish Council's own role and objectives, focusing on the land and buildings that it owns or manages, where the Council has the ability to set its own goals.

¹ ourworldindata.org/2024-living-planet-index '...across the 34,836 studied wildlife populations, the average decline was 73%'

² stateofnature.org.uk/

³ stateofnature.org.uk/countries/england/

⁴ buglife.org.uk/get-involved/surveys/bugs-matter/

⁵ butterfly-conservation.org/

⁶ naturalcambridgeshire.org.uk/lnrs/#nature-priorities

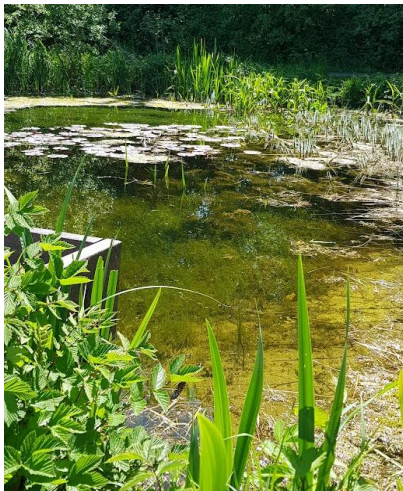
What

What is biodiversity?

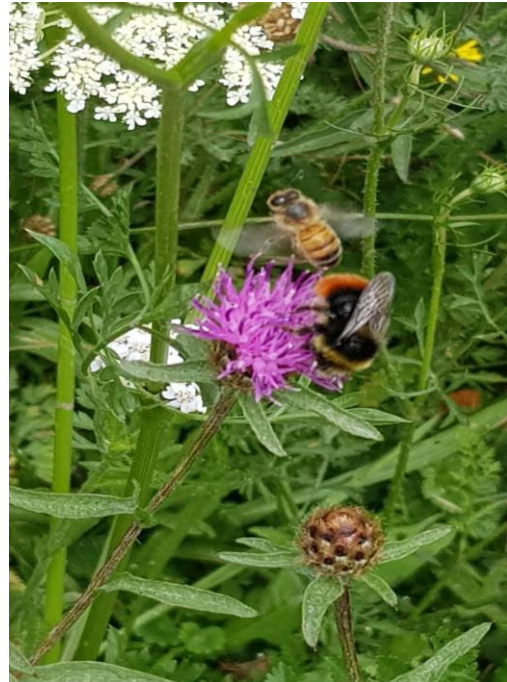
Biodiversity is all the different kinds of life found in one area: the variety of animals, plants, fungi, and microorganisms like bacteria that make up our natural world. Biodiversity is important for its own sake, but it is also the cornerstone of the ecosystems that provide us with food, fresh water and clean air.

What do we have in Burwell?

Although Burwell has no Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty ('National Landscapes'), we do have four County Wildlife Sites⁷ (Burwell Brick Pit, Burwell Disused Railway, Spring Close castle site and Pauline's Swamp) together with two Local Geological Sites (the springhead at Spring Close castle site and Carter's Pit⁸).



Pauline's Swamp 2021



Recreation ground border 2023

What can we do to improve?

This plan gives information and ideas for work to improve our green spaces for nature. It is designed for everyone in Burwell: individuals and organisations.

We also have very many gardens, several small green spaces and miles of grass verges. All these areas can be managed sympathetically for nature and everyone can take part.

⁷ cambridgeshire.gov.uk/asset-library/County-Wildlife-Sites-Handbook.pdf

⁸ cambsgeology.org/burwell-pit-and-spring

Why

Why bother trying to conserve nature in Burwell?

The world is facing major environmental challenges: the climate crisis, pollution and biodiversity loss. Whilst it is tempting to think these crises don't directly apply to Burwell (or not yet), built environments (housing, roads, commercial units) tend to have lower levels of biodiversity than natural environments due to the intensive use of land, fragmentation of green spaces, and the creation of barriers that can prevent the movement of species, limiting their ability to find food, shelter, and breeding partners.

For example, hedgehogs travel around one mile every night to find enough food and a mate.⁹ One of the main reasons hedgehogs are struggling in Britain is that our garden fences are becoming more secure, preventing hedgehogs from roaming.



In Burwell, we can take action to promote ecological connectivity and diversity - and so support the resilience of local ecosystems.

Conserving and improving biodiversity is not only beneficial to non-human life, but can also have important benefits for human well-being, such as improving air quality and local climate regulation, providing recreational and educational opportunities and contributing to mental health and psychological well-being. At the most extreme, human life is impossible in a failing ecosystem. We must act now and take action to support a healthy and biodiverse environment.



Road verge in Burwell 2024

However, sympathetically managed residential areas can support high levels of biodiversity: green spaces and parks. In addition, gardens can support a diverse range of native species and provide important habitats for insects, birds, and other animals.

⁹ hedgehogstreet.org/help-hedgehogs/link-your-garden/

Where

Where can we make a difference in Burwell

In and around Burwell there are many spaces, large and small, where can make a difference.

Private gardens Together, the UK's gardens are larger than all of our national nature reserves combined, making them as important for wildlife as they are for our own wellbeing¹⁰. In Burwell, these are the spaces where we are most likely to have the freedom to make a difference for wildlife. Small changes to small areas in lots of gardens add up to big wins for wildlife.

Farmland The 9.5 square miles that comprise the parish of Burwell is mostly farmland. Local agricultural practice therefore has a direct impact on biodiversity and the wellbeing of residents.

Solar farms and battery storage sites

These huge facilities are occupying more and more land across the parish of Burwell. As part of their planning approvals solar farms and battery storage operators are required to support nature locally through biodiversity net gain strategies. This can include, for example creating meadowlands, maintaining hedgerows, and adopting environmentally sensitive maintenance practices.

Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) land Weed management along Burwell's kerbed roads, pavements and some footpaths is carried out by CCC.

CCC owns Burwell House (between North Street and Silver Street) together with its three acres of grounds.

CCC is also responsible for some of the trees in the village – for example, those on The Causeway.



Toad spawn in the pond at Pauline's Swamp

Parish Council owned/managed green spaces, amenity areas and grass verges

The Parish Council owns the large open areas at Spring Close, Priory Meadow and Pauline's Swamp together with the allotments and the cemetery. It also owns smaller spaces at Pound Hill, Mill Close Green, Hatley Drive and Kingfisher Drive¹¹. The Parish Council also owns the amenity areas at the Recreation Ground including the Community Garden, Margaret Field and Jubilee Green.¹²

Some of the strips of land alongside roads and pathways are looked after by the Parish Council, others by the County Council.

See page 9 for further information

East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC) amenity areas The green space at Westhorpe play area is managed by ECDC.

¹⁰ wildlifetrusts.org/habitats/towns-and-gardens

¹¹ burwellparishcouncil.gov.uk/Council_Amenities_and_Services_34577.aspx

¹² burwellparishcouncil.gov.uk/Play_Areas_36771.aspx

Who

Who has a role to play? Who should take the lead on biodiversity in Burwell?

Individuals - everyone in Burwell can make a difference! Whether you have a farm or a window box, from simply appreciating our natural environment to taking active steps to improve it, we can all play a part.



Putting up bird nest boxes in Margaret Field 2024

Organisations - Burwell has a wide variety of community organisations. The Parish Council, churches, Wild Burwell, Burwell Belles WI, schools, Burwell and District Horticultural Society, Scouts and Guides, businesses..... just a few of the organisations which can make a difference. See the section **How** below to find out what is happening and what is possible...



Wild Burwell celebrating World Bee Day

Farmers and agricultural contractors - farming is the dominant economic activity in the area and the sector has an important role to play in supporting biodiversity.

Solar farms and battery storage sites – operators of these utilities should aim to deliver all their biodiversity commitments and, where possible, exceed them.

Businesses – whether in the manufacturing or services sector, the business community is well placed to support nature – both directly and indirectly.

How

Not sure **how** to start? Love hearing the birdsong but don't really know anything about wildlife? Worried that everything will get out of control and the village will become a mass of brambles and nettles?

Not everything has to be on a large scale. Small scale projects can create welcoming

spaces for nature amongst human infrastructure and allow native plants and animals to flourish.

A lawn with a patch left longer over the summer, or security lights fitted with sensors and timers rather than left on all the time can make significant differences to wildlife.

How to make a difference as an individual - in the garden

Managing your own space for nature and volunteering are two ways to have an impact.

Nature-friendly gardening is easy and cheap. Here are some top tips:

Avoid chemicals - they damage soil health, pollute water and harm wildlife from birds to hedgehogs to frogs. Pesticides are a major contributor to the biodiversity crisis and can be harmful to humans¹³.

Mow lawns less often - or at least parts of them. Short lawns are bad for biodiversity: wildlife has little to feed on and nowhere to hide. Fewer mows allows grass to grow a little longer and wildflowers to bloom, providing valuable food and shelter for wildlife. Consider waiting another week or two between cuts, taking part in Plantlife's annual No Mow May (and Let it Bloom June) campaign¹⁴, or leaving an area unmown for longer periods. Even the smallest grassy patch can be a haven for nature.

Make your own compost. Composting saves the energy used to produce shop-bought, plastic-wrapped compost, and avoids the transport costs and greenhouse gasses associated with plant and food waste going to landfill or incineration too. To make compost, mix layers of soft 'green' material, like grass, flowers and kitchen peelings, with drier, harder 'brown' material, like small sticks, dead stems and bits of cardboard.

Choose hedges for boundaries. If you're looking for garden fence ideas, consider hedging. Hedges can have beautiful blossom for insects (and humans!) and berries and shelter for birds. They also allow wildlife to travel through the neighbourhood. If you have a fence, make small gaps for hedgehogs.¹⁵

Make a pond - even a tiny pond or bird bath. A pond is one of the very best things you can do to attract wildlife to your garden.¹⁶

But do remember to follow the ROSPA guidelines¹⁷ to ensure your pond is safe for children. Garden ponds are involved in one in four of all child drownings in the home.



¹³ pan-uk.org/

¹⁴ plantlife.org.uk/campaigns/your-no-mow-may-lawn-guide/#experts-guide-to-lawn-length-

¹⁵ hedgehogstreet.org/help-hedgehogs/link-your-garden/

¹⁶ wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-pond

¹⁷ <https://www.rospace.com/water-safety/pond-safety>

How to make a difference as an individual - in the community

Light pollution. Everyone is familiar with insects flying around a light at night. But unfortunately, this attraction to light can have fatal consequences for the insects involved. Exhaustion, increased predation, and a disrupted ability to navigate are just some of the reasons why up to a third of insects attracted to lights die. Impacts are also seen in mating, feeding, navigating, development and even their ability to hatch at the correct time.¹⁸

Aim for natural darkness, and avoid artificial light at night where and when possible. Do you need to light up an area at night? Only use artificial lighting where there is a specific purpose or need. Lights should be turned off when not in use (automatically via timers and sensors, or manually). Lighting should be directed away from wild areas such as trees, hedgerows, wildflower meadows or rivers, streams and ponds. And close curtains at night.

Volunteering. If you have a bit of free time and want to do something in the open air to help our environment, Wild Burwell¹⁹ and the litter picking group welcome volunteers.

Pets. Let everyone enjoy our communal spaces by picking up after your dog. Bagged dog waste can be deposited in any of the litter bins around the village (there are more than 50).

Also think about the insecticides you use on your pets²⁰ - chemicals classed as too environmentally damaging to be used as pesticides on crops are still being routinely included in pet medicines. Chemicals used widely in tick, flea and worm treatments for cats and dogs can pollute rivers and harm to aquatic ecosystems. Recent research²¹ has found that there is a high prevalence of chemicals used for flea and tick treatments in bird nests. The research found that these insecticides are harmful to birds as there was a higher number of unhatched eggs or dead

chicks in nests containing more insecticides. Many pet owners leave fur outdoors after brushing their pet, where it may be collected by birds like blue tits and great tits to line their nests.



A blue tit's clutch of eggs inside a nest box.

¹⁸ buglife.org.uk/campaigns/light-pollution/

¹⁹ wildburwell.org

²⁰ pan-uk.org

²¹ pan-uk.org/garden-birds-are-being-poisoned-by-pet-flea-treatments/

How can organisations, businesses and farmers make a difference?

Wild Burwell is a group of residents working to improve nature in Burwell²². The group helps to care for the grasslands in Burwell, gives away and plants trees and puts up nest boxes. The group is planning restoration work on the spring and stream at the Spring Close castle site. You can support the group to take action for nature by donating, volunteering or suggesting projects.

St Mary's Church manages its churchyard for nature by allowing the grass to grow longer and wildflowers to bloom in some areas, and making insect habitats. No pesticides are used in the churchyard.

Burwell and District Horticultural Society encourages allotment holders and gardeners to reduce the use of pesticides. Contact Burwell Parish Council if you would like an allotment.

Burwell House has extensive gardens, with some areas left wild and overgrown to encourage wildlife and insects. The grounds are home to a wide range of native plants, trees, deer, birds, amphibians and reptiles.

Businesses Many small businesses don't have their own land or premises, but they can support local environmental initiatives through sponsorship or employee volunteering schemes.

Burwell Parish Council. See page 9

Professional gardeners Professional gardeners can improve biodiversity by reducing their use of chemicals and by recommending to their clients the planting of nature-friendly plants, shrubs and trees – particularly those that support pollinators..

Farmers and agricultural contractors Most Burwell residents are not involved in agriculture, but the environmental impact of farming affects everyone. Regulations controlling the use of pesticides, herbicides and plant growth regulators are

nationally determined, but we can encourage local farmers to go beyond those obligations, favouring sustainable farming practices whenever possible.

What can *your* organisation do to improve biodiversity? Many of the initiatives described in this plan are underway. But we need more people to notice, get informed, take part and support these actions and projects - and to suggest new ones. Contact Wild Burwell or the Parish Council for information and ideas.



²² wildburwell.org

Burwell Parish Council Biodiversity Action Plan

This section of the plan is about the Parish Council's role and objectives, focusing on the land and buildings that it owns or manages

The Parish Council owns or manages most of the public green spaces in Burwell, including the Recreation Ground, Spring Close, Priory Meadow, Jubilee Green, the cemetery, the allotments and Margaret Field, and is therefore perfectly placed to be at the heart of biodiversity initiatives in Burwell. To that end, it works closely with Wild Burwell, Spring Close Management Group and the Pauline's Swamp trustees.

A particular concern is the continued reliance on glyphosate for weed management by commercial gardeners, farmers, agricultural contractors, householders, Cambridgeshire County Council and by Burwell Parish Council. Alternative solutions have been trialled and implemented all over the country and the Parish Council is setting up a working group to evaluate the best alternative weed control methods for parish land in Burwell.

Achievements

Burwell Parish Council is committed to supporting local biodiversity and is proud of what it has already achieved in terms of preserving natural habitat and managing its land and buildings sustainably.

Climate Emergency response In 2020, Burwell Parish Council acknowledged the climate emergency and created a Climate Change Action Plan.

Climate Change, Biodiversity and Pollution Forum In 2021, the Council set up a Climate Change Forum that brought together Parish Councillors and representatives from Burwell Environment Group, Wild Burwell, Spring Close Management Group and Pauline's Swamp Trust. In 2025, recognising that climate change and environmental sustainability are closely connected, the group's name was changed to the Climate Change, Biodiversity and Pollution Forum, and its terms of reference were updated. The Forum meets bimonthly and can make recommendations to the full Council on issues relating to biodiversity in the Burwell area.

Nature-friendly grass cutting In Spring Close, Priory Meadow and the Cemetery, grass cutting is now timed to support biodiversity. Other grass areas, including Pound Hill and Mill Close Green which are particularly rich in local wildflowers, are cut less frequently during the summer so flowers can bloom and set seed. The sports pitches have borders which are left unmown in the summer months.

Community Garden A Community garden, with plantings that support pollinators, has been created at the Recreation Ground.

Tree planting Diverse native tree species have been planted and mature trees protected to increase carbon sequestration and enhance biodiversity.



Pound Hill 2024

Biodiversity Surveys

The Parish Council will need to decide whether to commission biodiversity surveys for the green spaces it owns or manages. The cost of professional surveys can be high, but the benefits would be:

- Having reliable information on which to make informed decisions about resource allocation
- Being better placed to win grants for projects that support local biodiversity
- Being able to provide convincing evidence to other groups when making the case for pro-biodiversity policies and actions (such as when responding to planning applications)
- Establishing a biodiversity baseline against which to track progress over time

Burwell Parish Council's Biodiversity Objectives

The Council's overall biodiversity aims are stated in the terms of reference of the Climate Change, Biodiversity and Pollution Forum (CBPF):

"Protect and enhance the quality, extent and accessibility of Burwell's 'green infrastructure' (open spaces, trees, waterways and natural environment) for people and biodiversity".

Working from that aim, we have identified the following objectives.

Objectives

Land Management

- Managing amenity land, wildflower meadows, grass verges, hedgerows, marshland and wooded areas for the benefit of biodiversity and wildlife habitat, particularly bees, butterflies and other pollinators
- Planting diverse native tree species and protecting mature trees to increase carbon sequestration and enhance biodiversity
- Working with others to find land and funding to create more local woods

Consultation, Liaison and Education

- Developing links with local farmers and agricultural contractors to help BPC understand the problems and support the transition to sustainable agriculture
- Encouraging solar farms and battery storage operators to meet, and where possible exceed, their biodiversity obligations
- Encouraging and supporting local businesses, landowners, clubs, societies and other organisations in the adoption of nature positive practices

Duties of Parish Councils

Burwell Parish Council's biodiversity aims are backed by the 2021 Environment Act, under which, public authorities (including town and parish councils) operating in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Parish Councils are required to agree their policies and objectives, and may spend funds in conserving biodiversity.

- Working with regulatory bodies, businesses and landowners to reduce pollution in local rivers
- Considering the impact of planning applications on biodiversity
- Informing residents to raise awareness of biodiversity issues and the importance of domestic gardens

Monitoring the Biodiversity Action Plan

Each year, in April, the Climate Change, Biodiversity and Pollution Forum will report to the Parish Council on progress towards the Biodiversity Action Plan's objectives, highlighting achievements, concerns and noting areas where the plan needs updating.

The report will be considered at a Parish Council meeting and will also be used as an input to the Parish Council Strategy Day, held each July.



Priory Wood
Credit: Claire Haskins

Five Year Biodiversity Action Plan for Burwell Parish Council

Start date: Jan 2026

Land management

Site/objective	Action and Intended Purpose/Outcome	Current Status	When	Reporting/Publicity
Investigate biodiversity audits	Investigate biodiversity audits for all BPC's large green spaces. Obtain quotations for suitable services, including follow-up audits, and produce an implementation plan. If too expensive, investigate non-council funding and/or consider alternative approaches. <u>Purpose</u> To establish our biodiversity baseline, enable information-based decision making and help us win grants	Not started	2026	Report to CBPF. CBPF to make recommendation to full Council
Conduct biodiversity audits	Carry out biodiversity audits per outcome of investigation. Share audit findings with other groups. <u>Purpose</u> as above	Not started	2026	Website Clunch magazine
Revise BPC's Biodiversity Action Plan	The audits will require revision of the Biodiversity Plan, including the creation of a management plan for each open space. Consider setting appropriate targets e.g. for tree planting <u>Purpose</u> To ensure the plan is consistent with findings of the audits.	Not started	2026/ 2027	CBPF to make recommendation to full Council
Conduct periodic follow-up audits	As budgets permit. <u>Purpose</u> To monitor the effectiveness of BPC's biodiversity plan and to help identify any changes required.	Not started	2028 & ongoing	Website Clunch

Land management (cont'd)				
Objective	Action and Intended Purpose/Outcome	Current Status	When	Reporting/Publicity
Manage green spaces <u>before</u> biodiversity audits completed	Encourage residents to remove litter and pick up after their dogs. Sympathetically maintain hedging and mature trees. Leave agreed areas (borders) unmown from April to August (inclusive). Work towards phasing out pesticide/herbicide use. Favour environment friendly pesticides and only use where absolutely necessary. <u>Purpose</u> To guide BPC biodiversity activity pre-audits	Ongoing Current policy Current policy Working group will investigate non-chemical weed management	2026	Website + Facebook + Clunch
Increase tree planting	Identify suitable location on parish land to plant new trees Work with others to find land and obtain funding to create more local woods e.g. the County Council, landowners and the Woodland Trust Follow relevant guidance in biodiversity audits	Current practice, but not quantified	Ongoing	No separate reporting required

Consultation, Liaison and Education				
Objective	Action and Intended Purpose/Outcome	Current Status	When	Reporting/Publicity
Raise residents' awareness of the importance of biodiversity	Create dedicated webpage with information, links and photographs. Emphasise the importance of gardens as habitats for wildlife. <u>Purpose</u> To engage and inform residents about biodiversity	Not started	2026/ 2027	Website Clunch

Understanding biodiversity in farming	Develop links with local farmers and agricultural contractors to help BPC understand the realities of biodiversity on and around farmland. <u>Purpose</u> To support the transition to sustainable agriculture	Not started	2026 onwards	No separate reporting required
Consultation, Liaison and Education (cont'd)				
Objective	Action and Intended Purpose/Outcome	Current Status	When	Reporting/Publicity
Improve biodiversity on local solar farms and battery storage sites	Develop links to local operators to encourage pro-nature management of the land. If possible, monitor compliance with biodiversity net gain commitments <u>Purpose</u> To ensure solar farms and battery storage operators meet, and where possible exceed, their biodiversity obligations	Not started	2026 onwards	Include in annual report on Biodiversity Plan
Defend and promote biodiversity in responses to planning applications	When commenting on planning applications, support site and building design that benefits biodiversity through conservation and integration of existing habitats or provision of new habitats. <u>Purpose</u> To increase BPC's focus of this aspect of planning	Current practice, but not done consistently	Ongoing	No separate reporting required
Encourage and support local businesses, landowners, clubs etc in the adoption of nature positive practices	Support volunteer hedge/tree planting and other initiatives to enhance habitats Support initiatives to develop young peoples' awareness of the environment around them Be open to working with local organisations/businesses to arrange events and offer volunteering opportunities to support biodiversity <u>Purpose</u> To increase the effectiveness of BPC's biodiversity efforts through co-operation and partnership	Current activity limited and ad hoc	2026 onwards	Website Clunch

Work with regulators, businesses and landowners to understand and reduce pollution in local rivers	Liaise with Anglian Water, the Internal Drainage Board, Environment Agency etc to understand and mitigate the local sources of river pollution <u>Purpose</u> To reduce the harm caused to biodiversity by river pollution	Not started	2026 onwards	No separate reporting required
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