

WIRRAL POLLINATOR STRATEGY

2022 – 2030



 **WIRRAL**

Contents	Page
1.0 Executive Summary	2
2.0 Background - The Importance of Pollinators	4
2.1 What are Pollinators?	4
2.2 Pollinators under threat	6
2.3 What Pollinators need	6
2.4 The National Pollinator Strategy (England)	8
2.5 Wirral's response to the Climate Emergency	8
3.0 Wirral's Pollinator Strategy	11
3.1 Key principles of the Strategy	11
3.2 Commitment from the Wirral Council	11
3.3 Our vision	11
3.4 Aims	11
3.5 Pollinator actions to date	12
3.6 Delivering the Pollinator Strategy	14
3.7 What do we mean by	18
3.8 Financing the Strategy	20
4.0 Consultation on the Strategy	21
4.1 Working with partners and partners initiatives	22
5.0 Local Authority Duties and obligations	23
5.1 Other relevant policies for Local Authorities	23
6.0 References	25

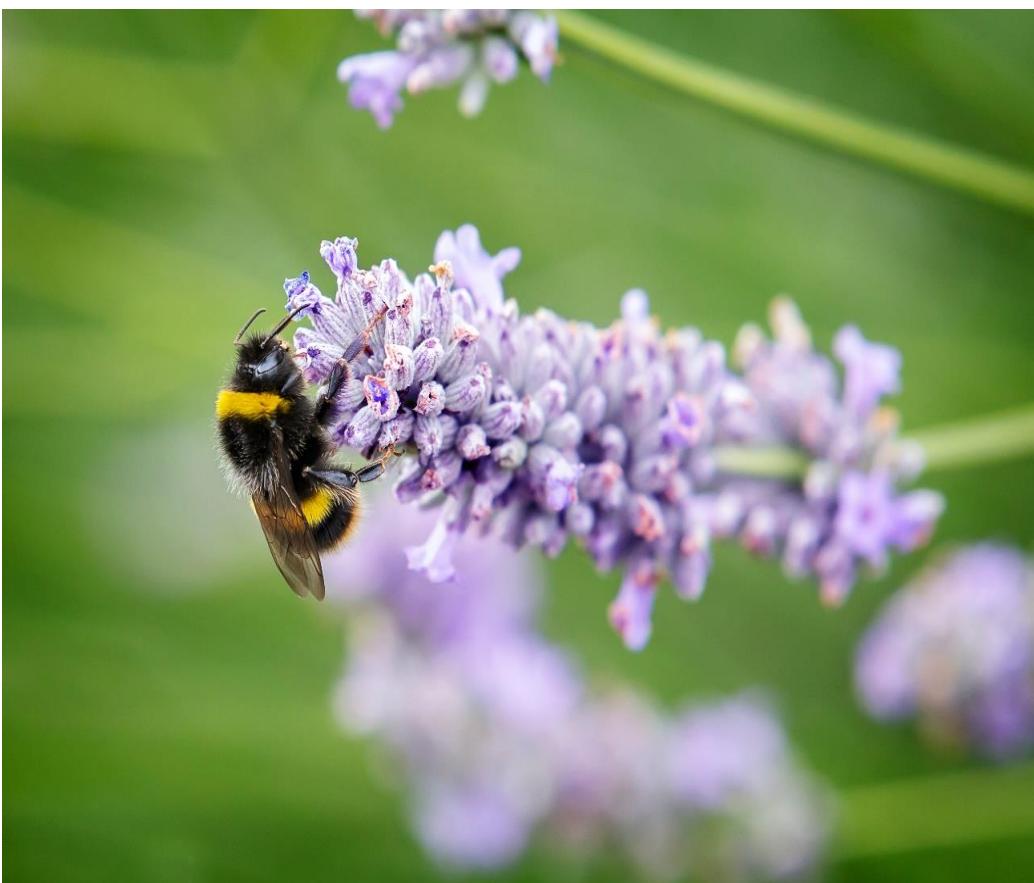
1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Insect pollinator species have experienced national declines
 - 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
 - 71% of our butterflies are in decline
 - Some studies show that since 1970, flying insect biomass has reduced by possibly three-quarters, so we may only have a quarter as many flying insects as 50 years ago.
- 1.2 The most significant factors leading to the decline in pollinator numbers include:
 - **Habitat loss** – 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.
 - **Pesticides** – 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 as farmland birds and soil organisms.
 - **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.
- 1.3 The Wirral Pollinator Strategy seeks to address the decline in pollinators and supports Wirral Council's commitment to addressing the Climate Emergency. This strategy recognises the importance of the natural environment and biodiversity and seeks to deliver the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Statement (2020) – Biodiversity – Transforming our open spaces and enhancing biodiversity. As such the Wirral Pollinator Strategy sits alongside the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy (2020-2030) and the two together seek to increase biodiversity locally.
- 1.4 The Wirral Pollinator Strategy sets out five broad aims that the Council and its partners will work together to deliver:
 - Ensure the needs of pollinators are represented in local plans, policy, and guidance for regeneration and economic development.
 - Protect, increase, and enhance the amount of pollinator habitat in Wirral to prevent extinctions and improve the status of any locally threatened species
 - Increase awareness of pollinators and their habitat needs across local residents, community and voluntary groups, businesses, and other landowners
 - Increase the contribution to pollinator conservation of all land under the

ownership of, or managed by the Council

- Improve our knowledge and understanding of pollinators in our local area

- 1.5 The Wirral Pollinator Strategy has been developed to raise awareness of the plight of pollinators and to ensure the Council and its local residents, community and voluntary groups, 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.



2.0 Background - The Importance of Pollinators

Pollinators are an essential component of our environment. 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 vegetables and fruits including apples, pears, strawberries, beans, and peas.

However, bee and pollinator health and declining populations have been increasingly highlighted as a cause for concern in the UK and globally. The main areas of concern for pollinators are land-use intensification, habitat destruction and fragmentation, disease, the use of agrochemicals, and climate change, although the importance of each of these and the extent to which they are inter-related is less well known.

2.1 What are Pollinators?

Insect pollinators including all types of bees, some wasps, butterflies, moths and hoverflies, some beetles, and flies.

Bees and wasps visit flowers to collect pollen and nectar to feed themselves or their developing young. Flowering plants have evolved to take advantage of this by offering nectar to insects most likely to carry their pollen to another plant.

The honeybee is the main managed pollinator of crops. Modern honeybee hives are sometimes moved from crop to crop, and beekeepers may charge for the pollination services provided whilst also harvesting the honey and other products. Crops which benefit from this include orchards and soft fruits (rose family) oil seed rape and other seed brassicas (cabbage family) and peas and beans (legumes).

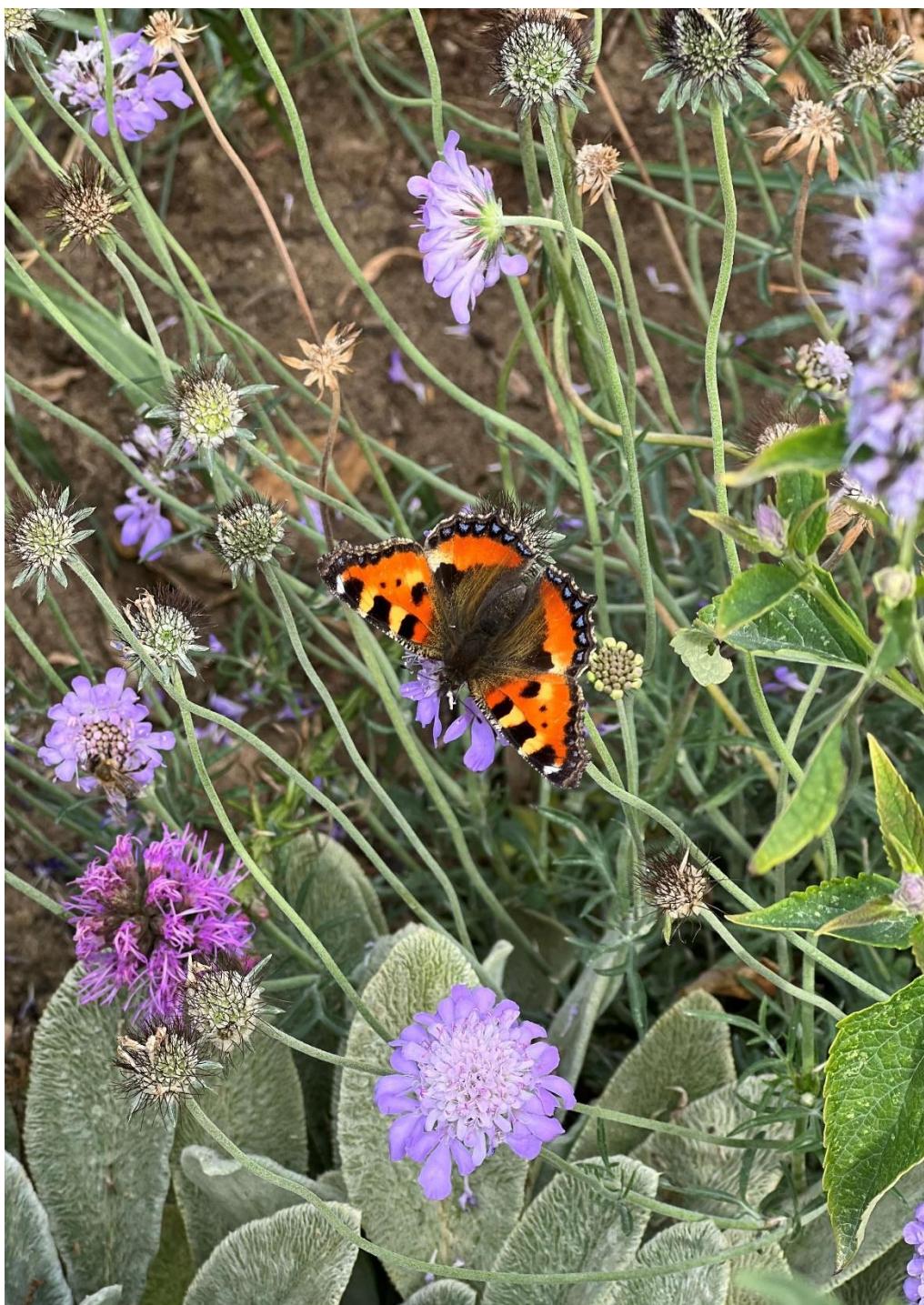
Bumblebees and solitary bees are also important pollinators that are essential to the maintenance of wild plant populations and to commercial crop production, particularly orchard and soft fruits and protected crops such as tomatoes. Pollinator kits are available for use in commercial glasshouses that use either non-native or UK origin bumblebees produced outside the UK. The queens are usually held captive, and the colonies destroyed at the end of the growing season, however many escape and can spread disease to wild populations.

Wasps often feed on nectar whilst on the lookout for other insects to prey upon, many of which are crop pests.

Butterflies and moths pollinate plants to various degrees by the action of the adult feeding on nectar. They are not major pollinators of UK food crops but are pollinators of many wildflowers.

Hoverflies are abundant on flowers for much of the year and the adults feed on nectar and pollen, carrots and apples being examples of crops that benefit from hoverfly pollination. However, the larvae eat a much more varied diet that often includes other insects. For this reason, predatory species of hoverfly are utilised as part of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as biological control agents.

Beetles: some beetles eat pollen and in moving from flower to flower are pollinators, especially of wildflowers.



2.2 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
- 71% of our butterflies are in decline
- Some studies show that since 1970, flying insect biomass has reduced by possibly three-quarters, so we may only have a quarter as many flying insects as 50 years ago.

The most significant factors leading to the decline 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.
2. **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 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.
3. **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.

2.3 What Pollinators need

Pollinators need food in the form of pollen and nectar foraged from a variety of flowering plant species, and diverse vegetation structure. Many plants and trees can provide these food resources, including many so called ‘weeds’ such as dandelions and thistles. Continuity of nectar and pollen supplies throughout the season is vital. In addition to flowers, many pollinators need other food resources to support their different life stages – for example butterfly and moth caterpillars need particular plants to feed on.

All pollinators need flowering semi-natural habitats such as wildflower meadows, hedgerows and woodland edges, and agricultural landscapes which include unimproved grassland, hay meadows, clover rich grasslands,

orchards, and arable crops. However, many of these habitats and land uses are declining or in short supply.

Although most honeybees have their shelter provided for them, other species need shelter such as log piles, rough grassland, hedges and dense shrubs, or dry-stone walls.

Food and shelter can be provided in gardens, parks, road verges, and any other open area. Pollinators are relatively easy to provide for, for example by planting or retaining appropriate plant species such as common knapweed in wildflower meadows, red clover in pasture, hawthorn and bramble in hedgerows and woodlands and cosmos in bedding areas



2.4 The National Pollinator Strategy (England)

The UK Government's National Pollinator Strategy for England (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 looks to 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.

In taking action across these five areas, Defra aims to achieve the following outcomes:

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

2.5 Wirral's response to the Climate Emergency

Wirral Council declared an Environment and Climate Emergency at a meeting of full Council on 15th July 2019. As a local authority, we can have a positive influence through how we organise our operations and services; the regulations and policies we set; the goods and services we buy; the investments we make; and the example we set to others. Tackling the ecological and climate crisis presents major opportunities locally to improve quality of life, health, well-being, and the economy.

Wirral Council is committing to acting to:

- Achieve 'net zero' carbon emissions associated with our activities by 2030 and to promote wider action to help reach 'net zero' emissions for Wirral as a whole no later than 2041.
- Identify risks and prioritise nature- based solutions to build resilience to climate change.
- Become a 'Carbon Literate' organisation.
- Promote sustainable regeneration and green investment, with a brownfield first development strategy in the Local Plan.
- Reduce unnecessary travel through planning and the use of information technology.
- Facilitate modal shift from fossil fuelled vehicle use to active travel, public transport, and ultra-low carbon vehicles (e.g., electric vehicles).

- Manage our use of energy, water, and resources as efficiently as possible.
- Promote sustainable resource use more widely, to encourage the transition to a less wasteful ‘circular economy’.
- Make use of cleaner renewable energy to meet our energy needs.
- Promote a wider shift to non-fossil fuel clean energy sources.
- Manage at least 30% of land in Wirral for the benefit of wildlife by 2030 (in line with Government commitments).
- Ensure a 20% ‘net gain’ in biodiversity across all council land
- Increase tree planting to double Wirral’s tree canopy cover.
- Increase the number of parks and open spaces achieving green flag status.

Wirral Council seeks to progress its ambitions by ensuring that consideration of the environment and climate emergency is integral to its function, decision-making, service delivery and resource allocation; by learning from and working constructively with others; and by showing leadership and encouraging wider action. We will:

- Embed sustainable decision making and ways of working in all areas of council activity.
- Monitor progress on the impact of the Council’s actions and seek to achieve continual improvement.
- Provide training and briefings for councillors and employees about the environment and climate emergency.
- Communicate progress regularly and publicly.
- Encourage learning and innovation within and between organisations.
- Support positive engagement with partner organisations and residents.
- Develop and deliver the Council’s Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan.
- Support the delivery of the ‘Cool2’ Wirral Climate Change Strategy.
- Deliver the Wirral Tree Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy.
- Further the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity through the development of a local nature recovery strategy for Wirral.
- Develop a Wirral walking and cycling implementation plan.
- Help deliver the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) transport plan objectives to decarbonise travel and the LCRCA local journeys strategy.
- Develop a Wirral electric vehicle strategy.
- Review and update the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Statement on an annual basis from the date of implementation (March 2021).

The Wirral Council 2025 Plan underlines our ambitions concerning the environment and climate emergency. The authority’s Chief Executive, directors, and managers have responsibility to incorporate environment and climate emergency issues into business planning and day-to-day procedures and practices in dialogue with staff. Councillors have responsibility for shaping policy, taking decisions, and scrutinising progress. All elected members and employees have a role in helping to put this policy into practice.

Biodiversity

A key strand of Wirral Council's commitment to addressing the Climate Emergency recognising the importance of the natural environment and biodiversity. The Council and its partners will develop biodiversity through:

A Tree, Woodland, and Hedgerow Strategy, to double canopy cover, has already been adopted and addresses: -

- Establish a nature recovery network for Wirral to identify where tree planting, habitat restoration, recreation and management opportunities can bring the strongest environmental benefits for biodiversity, flood attenuation and mitigation of climate change.
- Rewild verges and hedgerows to connect and enhance the wider ecological network.
- Require all development proposals to deliver an overall 10% net gain for biodiversity calculated using a biodiversity metric.
- Planting over 200,000 trees in Wirral by 2030.
- Work with partner organisations through the Tree Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy Advisory Board and engage with local and national stakeholders.

Transforming our open spaces and enhancing biodiversity

- Proactively support pollinators through a Pollinator Strategy, this strategy.
- Commit to phasing out the use of Glyphosate and other harmful chemicals on our estate.
- Invest in 'blue/green' infrastructure including re wilding verges and hedgerows to create wildlife corridors.
- Uphold our allotment policy and support for local food production.
- Protect and enhance our natural assets, obtaining further green and blue flag awards and improve the ratings of our SSSIs.
- Increase the biodiversity value of our parks and green spaces by wildlife-friendly management and habitat creation, supported by public and staff education.

3.0 Wirral's Pollinator Strategy

This Pollinator Strategy seeks to address the decline in Pollinators and supports Wirral Council's commitment to addressing the Environment and Climate Emergency. This strategy recognises the importance of the natural environment and biodiversity and seeks to deliver the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Statement (2020) – Biodiversity – Transforming our open spaces and enhancing biodiversity. As such this Pollinator Strategy sits alongside the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy (2020-2030) and the two together seek to increase biodiversity locally.

3.1 Key principles of the Strategy

This strategy 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.

3.2 A Commitment from the Wirral Council

Wirral 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. Wirral Council will seek to protect and increase the amount and quality of pollinator habitat and manage its greenspace to provide greater benefits for pollinators. We will ensure local people are provided with opportunities to make Wirral more pollinator friendly.

3.3 Our vision: *Our local environment will be rich in flower-rich habitats, helping support sustainable pollinator populations and making places more attractive for people to live and work in*

3.4 Aims: The Council and its partners will work together to:

- Ensure the needs of pollinators are represented in local plans, policy, and guidance for regeneration and economic development.
- Protect, increase, and enhance the amount of pollinator habitat in Wirral to prevent extinctions and improve the status of any locally threatened species
- Increase awareness of pollinators and their habitat needs across local residents, community and voluntary groups, businesses, and other landowners
- Increase the contribution to pollinator conservation of all land under the ownership of, or managed by the Council
- Improve our knowledge and understanding of pollinators in our local area

3.5 Pollinator actions to date

The Council recognises the importance of the natural environment and the role that it can play in tackling climate change. Insect pollinator species have experienced national declines, in part due to the loss and fragmentation of habitat space.

Wirral Council has been developing a number of pollinator friendly initiatives for some time with Parks & Countryside Services implementing an initial action plan in 2019, to review established mowing regimes and consider adopting the practices detailed in Road Verge and Wildlife Management Guidelines (2019) by Plantlife.

Wirral Council has had some early success in promoting pollinators, being recognised in 2020 for its work in this area with a Bees' Needs Champions Awards for the Meadow Restoration Project at Wirral Country Park. Bees play a part in every aspect of the ecosystem, they support the growth of trees, flowers, and other plants, which serve as food and shelters for creatures large and small, Bees contribute to complex, interconnected ecosystems that allow a diverse number of different species to co-exist.

An unexpected consequence of the COVID-19 Pandemic has also contributed to progressing plans for pollinators. In Spring 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic and full lockdown resulting in Parks & Countryside staff being redeployed to support essential services and the response to the pandemic led to an 8-week delay in commencing the grass cutting at the start of the season. This meant that the grass across the borough had been allowed to grow much longer than in previous years, which in turn enabled certain native wildflowers to grow and prosper in the unmaintained verges.

This unexpected outcome of the lockdown generated a lot of positive public feedback, people wanted to see an expansion of rewilded areas to enhance wildlife and supported a reduction in grass cutting. As a direct result a number of key initiatives have started, including:-

1. **Rewilding** of amenity greenspaces and highway grass verges - In 2021/22 729,412m² (7.3 Hectares) of amenity space and highway verges were identified as rewilding sites, meaning that they would no longer be mown regularly, apart from edges and footpaths, in order that they provide habitats for pollinators and insects. These areas only received one cut, during the autumn to prevent areas becoming unmanageable.
2. **Pollinator areas** - In 2021/22 59 areas were identified as being potentially pollinator friendly. Designated Pollinator sites are left to grow and were managed to encourage the development of the naturally occurring wildflowers identified.
3. **Reduced frequency of grass maintenance** - In 2021/22 a reduced maintenance regime was put in place across all general grass areas in parks and public open spaces. This reduced the number of cuts per year from 14 to 10. In 2022/23 a further reduction from 10 cuts per year to 8 was put in place.

4. **'No Mow May'** - In 2021/22 Wirral Council took part in Plantlife's National Campaign of 'No Mow May' to both raise awareness of the importance of not cutting grassed areas during May and to allow for pollinators to increase their numbers during the month of May. This continued in 2022/23 with all general grass areas in parks and public open spaces remaining uncut during the period.
5. **'Bee Bus Shelter'** – In November 2022 Wirral Council developed a pilot 'Bee Bus Shelter' in order to introduce Pollinators into urban areas, working in partnership with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.



The initiatives have reduced the amount of disturbance to habitats which promote pollinators, provided opportunities for amenity greenspaces to be used in different ways to support re-wilding / pollinators and reduce the cost of maintenance.

In addition to these important initiatives, which are directly related to this Pollinator Strategy, it is important to note that over 11 Hectares of open space has also been identified and set aside for Tree Planting. This has supported the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy in its first two years of delivery and allowed for 45,000 trees to be planted in several locations towards its 200,000-tree target.

In total, including the Tree Planting initiatives, just over 18 Hectares of land has been used to support biodiversity initiatives, or to put this into context the equivalent of four 18-hole golf courses. In addition, grass cutting maintenance on all general grass areas in parks and public open spaces has been reduced by just under 43%.

3.6 Delivering the Pollinator Strategy

To deliver the aims of this strategy Wirral Council will deliver on the following objectives and actions.

Aim 1: To ensure the needs of pollinators are represented in local plans, policy, and guidance for regeneration and economic development.

- Increase the protection afforded to pollinator habitats and the species they support by ensuring appropriate recognition in local plans and policies
 - Carry out a review of existing surveys and biodiversity mapping to identify key pollinator habitats present in the area
 - Take forward a review, and where required revise current polices to take account of the needs of pollinators
 - Ensure existing pollinator-friendly habitats are protected wherever possible in new development, using the mitigation hierarchy.
- Increase the profile of habitats of value to pollinators in biodiversity asset, green infrastructure, and other maps
 - Survey habitats, including brownfield, parks, verges etc. to assess their importance for pollinators
 - Review and revise biodiversity asset maps to recognise importance of pollinator habitats.
 - Work with the Liverpool City Region in preparing Nature Improvement Areas and Nature Recovery Areas (under the Environment Act 2021) considering the needs of pollinators. Corridors, steppingstones and other networks are very important to enable pollinators to breed and move.
- 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
 - Use Section 106 agreements to ensure greenspaces in new developments are made pollinator friendly
 - Ensure Biodiversity Net Gain includes measures to promote pollinator-friendly habitats and their management.

Aim 2: To protect, increase and enhance the amount of pollinator habitat in Wirral and prevent any extinction and improve the status of any locally threatened species.

- Increase the value of Local Wildlife Sites for pollinators
 - Where appropriate ensure the needs of pollinators are considered in the management of 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
- Increase the value of parks and other greenspace for pollinators
 - Identify areas of parkland which will benefit from Re-Wilding, Pollinator designation or Tree and hedgerow planting.
 - Work with local communities to develop a balanced approach to park management to support a range of uses and wildlife benefits
 - Reduce grass cutting of public green space
 - Invest in suitable machinery for cutting long grass at end of season.
- Reduce the impact of pesticides on pollinators and other wildlife
 - Review use of pesticides and neonicotinoids (including seed dressing, plants, and turf) and aim to reduce their use by the Council
 - Provide all tenants with advice on pollinator-friendly horticulture including information on the harmful effects of neonicotinoid pesticides.



Aim 3: To increase awareness of pollinators and their habitat needs across local residents, community and voluntary groups, businesses, and other landowners

- Increase awareness of pollinators in the local community and within local businesses
 - Provide information on pollinator friendly gardening activities to residents and local allotment holders
 - Create pollinator friendly flower beds and shelter features in parks and link these to interpretation about pollinators
 - Promote pollinators to local business forums and individual businesses to help biodiversity and improve the local environment
- Increase the number of young people who understand the value of their local pollinators
 - Encourage local schools to develop wildflower areas in school grounds
 - Develop a pollinator award for schools



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

- Make council owned land and buildings more pollinator friendly
 - Designate areas of land as 'Rewilding' or 'Pollinator' and manage these areas to promote and support pollinators
 - Increase pollinator friendly planting in flowerbeds around Council offices etc
 - Explore and increase the use of green roofs and/or pollinator nesting features, installing these on new Council buildings and publicise this work as good practice.
 - Increase the number of Allotments in the borough and educate allotment holders about pollinator-friendly practices where necessary.
- Increase the area of pollinator habitats on local greenspace managed by local groups
 - Work with and support 'friends of groups' to manage and create pollinator habitats
 - Explore transferring Council land to the community for community allotments or other community growing facilities.

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

- Establish effective monitoring of work being carried out in our area
 - Carry out a brief review of achievements annually and publicise success to local communities
 - Encourage staff and contractors to feedback on actions they take for pollinators and provide an award for best practice
- Increase information on the status of pollinators
 - Encourage local people to support national pollinator monitoring schemes
 - Continue to support the 'No Mow May' initiative to raise awareness amongst residents.
 - Workforce plan to upskill and involve employees to deliver the Pollinator Strategy.
 - Inform and educate residents and partners on the need for greater biodiversity.

3.7 What do we mean by

A number of different terms are used to describe different initiatives outlined in this strategy, this section outlines what is meant by these different terms.

Tree, Woodland & Hedgerow Strategy

- Planting trees and hedgerows in appropriate locations on both Council and private land to increase tree cover and promote biodiversity.

Reduced Grass Cutting

- The frequency Wirral Council cuts grass has been reduced. From April 2022 the frequency of grass cutting has been reduced to 8 cuts per year.
- Key areas where growth would be inappropriate continued to be maintained as normal, these included, cemeteries, sports pitches & bowling greens, play areas, ornamental gardens, and highway verges.
- As a part of this reduced maintenance, Wirral Council observes 'No Mow May', a national campaign led by Plantlife.

Re-Wilding

- These areas, predominantly drawn from amenity greenspaces and highway verges, are allowed to grow to provide a habitat for Pollinators.
- Re-Wilding areas receive a mown edge border of 1.5m cut and/or pathways to maintain access and sightlines throughout the year, in line with reduced grass cutting maintenance.
- These areas will receive a whole area cut, in the Autumn, each year to prevent low value growth and allow for future uses.
- Rewilding areas may be re-purposed as potential areas for tree planting schemes, allotments (considering that allotments can and do add to biodiversity), pollinator sites or could be maintained by community groups.
- Wirral Council is guided by Plantlife's 2019 guidance - Road, Verge and Wildlife Management Guidelines.

Pollinator Sites

- These areas are similar to Re-Wilding areas in that they are predominantly drawn from amenity greenspaces and highway verges. However, these sites have been identified as having a higher prevalence of naturally occurring wildflowers that support pollinators and are therefore more valuable from a biodiversity perspective.
- These areas are managed to promote and encourage the naturally occurring pollinators identified. Currently three different management approaches are applied, dependent of the type of wildflowers that is most prevalent:-
 - **Spring flowers** - no spring cut, mow only after mid-June, remove cuttings if possible
 - **Hay-meadow regime** - no spring cut, mow after mid-July, remove cuttings if possible.

- **Summer flowers** - mow in March, leave unmown till September, remove cuttings, or cut up small
- Wirral Council is guided by Plantlife's 2019 guidance - Road, Verge and Wildlife Management Guidelines.
- Pollinator sites do receive a mown edge border of 1.5m cut and/or pathways to maintain access and sightlines.
- In order to raise public awareness of the sites most have had signs installed to inform residents of their purpose.



3.8 Financing the Strategy

Many of the actions put forward to deliver this strategy may be achieved at low or no cost. Effectively engaging with residents, Friends Groups and other volunteers can raise awareness and deliver upon a wide range of actions and these opportunities do need to be maximised.

However, there are some aspects of this strategy that will require financing for instance: -

- The purchase of updated flail mower machinery to manage longer grass land,
- The provision of seeds and plants and clearing areas in order to develop further Pollinator sites or allotments, and
- In developing or using different approaches to weed control. The use of Glyphosate continues to be the cheapest form of weed control with alternatives costing significantly more to adopt.

Wirral Council is committed to addressing the Climate Emergency and as a part of this increasing Biodiversity. To deliver upon this strategy, where additional funds may be required, Wirral Council will seek support from National Initiatives in order to obtain grant funding and where necessary seek additional support from Council funds such as the Climate Emergency Budget or Capital in order to deliver upon the highest priority objectives and actions of this strategy.

4.0 Consultation on the Strategy

Changes to the way Wirral carries out grass maintenance and the introduction of re-wilding and pollinator areas formed a part of Wirral Council's budget for 2021/22, consultation was undertaken between November 2020 and January 2021. These proposals were supported by residents when balanced against other reductions in services.

Wirral Council's website detailed the new grass maintenance regime, including 'No Mow May'. Areas put forward for re-wilding or pollinator designation were also published. Through this web page residents were able to raise issues with the sites selected. In addition, elected members have been very active during 2021/22 in putting forward alternative areas for consideration. These schemes were also featured in Wirral View.

An Operational Review of the implementation of the 2021/22 Pollinator Pilots was presented to the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee for comment on 20th January 2022.

A joint Wirral Council / Wirral Wildlife workshop was held on the 14 February 2022 with Members of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee to discuss Wirral Council's approach to Pollinators to inform the initial development of this strategy.

Further consultation was held with all elected members being invited to attend Pollinator Strategy Ward meetings with officers from Parks & Countryside in July 2022 to take part in the consultation and to shape both this strategy and to review both past and proposed future Re-Wilding & Pollinator sites.

Public consultation was undertaken on the development of the Wirral Pollinator Strategy (September 2022) via a survey on the 'Have Your Say' webpage and paper copies were available upon request. Results indicated strong support for a number of statements which underpin the strategy which included:

- 81.4% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the council should increase the number of areas that support pollinators to thrive', and 7.6% strongly disagreed.
- 85.3% strongly agreed that 'the council should reduce the impact, where possible, of pesticides on pollinators. 5.9% strongly disagreed.
- 67.8 % feel aware of what they can do in their local area to help increase and support pollinators. 11.7% do not feel aware.
- 62.4% strongly agree that 'the council needs to do more to educate people on the importance of pollinators. In total, 87.1% agreed and 4.7% disagreed.
- 94.1% of respondents feel aware of what they can do in their local area to help increase and support pollinators. However, 3.5% do not feel aware.
- 64% strongly agree that 'The council should look to involve more volunteer groups and support them in the pollinator conservation work', 3.5% strongly disagree.

- 87.0% believe ‘the council should monitor the number of pollinators to track changes to pollinator populations. However, 5.9% strongly disagreed, and 0.6% disagreed.
- 95.8% of respondents agreed that ‘the council should consider pollinators and their habitats in all future planning’, with 3.5% disagreement.

When asked if there was anything else that the respondents would like to tell us about pollinators, the most common category of response was that there was a need for education about pollinators. Respondents also believed the council should create an effective plan for pollinators to thrive and that the council should take a holistic view when creating a Pollinator Strategy, for it to be a success.

When asked to provide any concerns regarding the increase of pollinators, 56% did not have any concerns. However, some were concerned that some maintenance would still be needed. 4.5% of respondents believed that a Pollinator Strategy alone is not enough, and that more action should be taken to benefit the environment due to its importance. However, another concern was that a Pollinator Strategy may be misinterpreted by the public and lead to opposition from residents. There was also a concern that without proper planning, a Pollinator Strategy may be ineffective.

4.1 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. More joined up collaborative action for pollinators will help ensure a future for these especially important species.

Parks and Countryside Services are continuing to identify and promote suitable pollinator sites in parks and open spaces across Wirral with officers exploring how they can further work with residents, councillors, and partners such as Friends of Parks Groups and Wirral Wildlife Trust.

Representatives from Wirral Wildlife, Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS) and New Ferry Butterfly Park have been consulted with in the development of this strategy.

5.0 Local Authority Duties and obligations

Local authorities have a Duty to conserve biodiversity in exercising their functions under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006. This Biodiversity Duty requires all local authorities to make biodiversity an integral part of policy and decision making. This includes the restoration and enhancement of pollinator populations and habitats.

In November 2021 the long-awaited Environment Act (2021) was enacted. The Act brought in new and additional obligations on Public Authorities including:

- An enhanced biodiversity duty on Local Authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity within exercising their functions on their own estate
- Local Authorities to produce a five-yearly Biodiversity Reports on action taken and impacts
- Introduction of Local Nature Recovery Strategies across England led by a responsible body – the LCR Mayoral Combined Authority
- Mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain for all new development (November 2023)

In the Liverpool City Region preparatory work on a Local Nature Recovery Strategy is underway and once complete this overarching strategy will establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits.

Regarding biodiversity net gain, England is halfway through a two-year transition phase towards mandatory net gain. The LCR Local Planning Authorities, including Wirral, are in the final stages of preparing an interim BNG Information Note.

This pollinator strategy can be regarded as a district-level delivery plan for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and forms part of Wirral Council's response to its enhanced biodiversity duty.

Developing and implementing a Local Pollinator Strategy will help to demonstrate local authorities' commitment to biodiversity and help to fulfil their legal duty whilst also contributing toward delivery of key objectives outlined in the National Pollinator Strategy. ‘

In addition, the Council has a statutory duty to keep roadside verges cut to a reasonable height to maintain sightlines for road users.

5.1 Other relevant policies for Local Authorities

The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (Section 37) which requires development plans “to include policies encouraging the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna.

The National Planning Policy Framework (2021) paragraphs 174 and 179 requires planning authorities to minimise impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity by ensuring planning policies:

- Plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale across local authority boundaries
- Promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations, linked to national and local targets, and identify suitable indicators for monitoring biodiversity in the plan.

6.0 References

The National Pollinator Strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England (November 2014) - The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK

Supporting document to the National Pollinator Strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England (November 2014) - The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK

National Pollinator Strategy: Implementation Plan (November 2015) - The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK

National Pollinator Strategy: Implementation Plan, 2018-2021 (December 2018) - The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK

National Pollinator Strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England - Evidence statements and Summary of Evidence 'Management and Drivers of Change of Pollinating Insects and Pollination Services (January 2019) – The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK

The good verge guide: a different approach to managing our waysides and verges (2016) Plantlife

Road Verges and their potential for pollinators: A review of costs, benefits, and management options (2019) Buglife

Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Statement (March 2021) – Wirral Council

Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy (2020-2030) – Wirral Council

Road, Verge and Wildlife Management Guidelines (2019) - Plantlife