

Progressing the OPC Biodiversity Action Plan

Overview

The Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) suggests a number of activities which together aim to increase the biodiversity of the Parish as a whole. Given the threat to the environment and the loss of species generally, and in the UK particularly, this is an important response to the declared Climate Emergency.

Overall the BAP can be addressed through three workstreams:

- 1 Adjustments to the maintenance regime of OPC owned land which incur little or no additional cost.
- 2 Adjustments and enhancements to the maintenance regime which together can be presented as a costed proposal to potential sponsors and funders.
- 3 Community based projects which can be led and supported by OPC with little resource provided from the Precept.

Proposed way forward

Workstream 1 – Projects within our current maintenance programme

There are several opportunities to adjust the mowing regime in the Cemetery, Community Orchard, Peace Garden and Recreation Ground which will encourage diversity of species in what is now predominantly grass. Rather than seed these areas with native wild seed, the approach is to wait and see what returns/arrives with a more sympathetic mowing regime. This is the idea behind the 'No Mow May' initiative.

A potential adverse effect of this is that residents may not understand the change and it can look scruffy at times. The mitigation is to ensure good communications with some signage as well as social media and newsletter articles, and to manage the mowing to ensure there are crisp demarcations between mown and uncut areas, including obvious paths which invite exploration as well as facilitating use of footpaths.

For example – the Community Orchard is currently mown 8 times a year. This can be reduced to twice a year for most of the site, ensuring that the main path across is cut as well as access to the bench and a meandering path through the uncut area which will invite exploration. A similar approach can be taken with a much larger area of the older, southern area of the Cemetery. Care will be taken to avoid and memorial stones, and to stop the area short of the current actively used cemetery. The 'old' cemetery will become a wildlife haven and can be interpreted as such through limited signage.

In the recreation Ground the uncut areas will be limited to the 2-3m in front of the hedges – creating what are known as ecotones which are advantageous to wildlife. There will be clear demarcation of these areas and in time they can become attractive and soften the rather stark aesthetic of this space.

In the Peace Garden the area suitable for this treatment is the bank on the southern edge (on the right as viewed from the road).

This approach will not incur more cost, but neither will it save money. The less frequent cuts become much larger jobs, generating more material to be removed and processed so the change is cost neutral..

Workstream 2 – Projects which require some additional resource

This can be broken down into small tasks that require some resource from OPC to purchase seed or plants and then recruitment of volunteers to do the planting. Opportunities include:

- a) Plug planting spring flowers such as native primrose and cowslips and bulbs including snowdrops and crocus on the mound in the Peace Garden.
- b) Planting the new bank created at the top of the cemetery with low growing shrubs and bulbs. This could be offered to rights holders and others as an opportunity to plant a shrub in memory of a loved one.
- c) Making bird and bat boxes for the Community Orchard, Old Cemetery and Colt Hill areas. This could potentially be a project with the Hook Men Sheds, RMS (who have an excellent design and technology facility) and other community groups.

Workstream 3 – Projects in the wider community

This is one of the objectives of Greening Odiham and North Warnborough phase 2 where residents are encouraged to 'make space for nature' in their own gardens.

Proposal

That OPC resolve that:

1 Larkstel are requested to alter their mowing regimen at the Cemetery, Community Orchard, Recreation Ground and Peace Garden as described above. This has been discussed with Larkstel and they are happy to proceed.

2 The 3 options outlined are developed with costings and if these fall within the proposed budget for the BAP action plan they are progressed. The timescale is likely to be 12-24 months to complete all three.

3 OPC has already committed to progressing GO&NW Phase 2 and that the Make Space for Nature strand is developed to meet the proposed community actions in the BAP.

4 Review any actions in the BAP which cannot be achieved in the above, develop and cost same to form a proposal for sponsorship in years 2 onward of the BAP.