



How to speak up for nature in your local area

Sometimes you may see something that you feel is not in the best interests of wildlife on your patch. Things like mowing regimes, weed spraying, hedge cutting, tree felling or just general activity that is damaging for wildlife. If you are concerned about an issue impacting nature in your local area it can be a confusing and frustrating process trying to find out who is responsible. This leaflet is designed to give you some general information to help you find out who can help and to speak up for nature on key issues in your area.

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Reporting a Wildlife Crime

If you witness a suspected wildlife crime in action call 999 immediately. In all other instances, call 101 for the non-emergency service and ask to speak to your local Wildlife Crime Officer. To remain anonymous, call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111. Wildlife crime includes activities such as poaching, theft of wild plants and theft or disturbance of wild birds and their nests.

Who is responsible?

In Somerset, there are three tiers of local government: county council, district councils and town or parish councils. If you need to get in touch with either the County or district council, you can use the online portal to direct your enquiry to right person: somerset.gov.uk/contact-us

Somerset County Council

The county council is responsible for services across the county including the management of road verges, waste disposal, rights of ways, the three AONBs in Somerset and carrying out Habitats Regulations Assessment on both County Council plans, planning applications and on behalf of the district councils.

SCC are responsible for developing guidance and plans that impact the entirety of the county. This includes the Somerset Pollinator Action Plan and the Somerset Highways Biodiversity Manual.

District Councils

There are 4 district councils in Somerset: South Somerset West and Taunton, Sedgemoor, Mendip and South Somerset. District councils work along side SCC to provide local services such as waste collection, planning applications and environmental problems like fly-tipping.

Town and Parish Councils

These are elected councils that can help shape the communities they represent on a number of local issues by commenting on planning proposals, communicating with authorities and other tiers of government on behalf of their community and undertaking local projects.

Parish councils are usually responsible for allotments, play areas and some local parks as well as other community assets. They have real potential to make an impact for nature on the most local level.

AONBS and National Parks

The National Park Authorities have a remit: To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Parks, and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Parks by the public.

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a designated exceptional landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are precious enough to be safeguarded in the national interest.

Where you believe an action, or inaction, may impact the character or quality of the National Park or AONB the relevant authority should be contacted.

Natural England

Natural England are responsible for compliance and enforcement of some laws that protect wildlife and the natural environment, including: Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); environmental damage regulations; heather and grass burning; agricultural work that affects uncultivated land or semi-natural areas; breaches of wildlife licences and notices; pesticide poisoning to animals; complaints relating to weeds. Natural England can be contacted at enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk or at a local office.

The Environment Agency

Within England the Environment agency are responsible for: regulating major industry and waste treatment of contaminated land; water quality and resources; fisheries; inland river, estuary and harbour navigations; conservation and ecology. They are also responsible for managing the risk of flooding from main rivers, reservoirs, estuaries and the sea. Environmental incidences such as pollution or damage to the natural environment should be reported to the Environment Agency incident hotline on 0800 807060.

Nature Recovery Networks in Somerset

We need to create a Nature Recovery Network that extends into every part of our towns, cities and countryside, bringing wildlife and the benefits of a healthy natural world into every part of life. Currently only 10% of Somerset can be classified as being in good natural or semi-natural condition with species-rich natural habitats supporting abundant and diverse wildlife, enabling it to move, reproduce and thrive. For nature to recover, we need to triple the amount of land managed for nature, creating an interconnected network across our entire county. Land of any size can contribute to the Nature Recovery Network – nature reserves, community spaces, gardens, farms, parks, churchyards and schools.

Local people must step forward to give nature a voice and ensure nature is placed at the heart of all decisions. Councils at a parish, town, district and county level are responsible for key areas such as planning, green spaces and waste management which have the potential for a big impact on nature's recovery.



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Private Landowners, organisations and charities

Private landowners refers to businesses, organisations and charities who own or manage land outside of public ownership, which can include everything from small urban gardens to vast commercial estates. Landowners are responsible for the management of their land in accordance with all relevant wildlife, environmental and access laws. If the land is SSSI there are additional requirements, which Natural England are responsible for enforcing.

Many larger landowners also claim grants under a number of different schemes for the management of their land, including incentives to protect the environment. These are administered by the Rural Payments Agency, under Defra.

Conservation charities such as the Wildlife Trust, RSPB and National Trust are private landowners. These organisations also campaign and lobby national and local authorities to change their practices for the benefit of wildlife and may also offer land management advice directly to the individual or organisation responsible for the management of the land. However we/they do not have any authority to intervene or enforce wildlife law.

Engaging with the planning system

We need to ensure developments take place sustainably, making space for nature to thrive and local people to enjoy all the health and wellbeing benefits of living life in connection with nature.

Local people must step forward to give nature a voice and ensure nature is placed at the heart of all planning decisions. There are two main ways to have your say about future developments: You can contribute to your local Neighbourhood Plan through local consultations or you can comment on a planning application that has already been submitted. Please see the further reading list for more resources.

Verge and hedgerow management

Road verges provide habitat for a huge number of wild plants some of which are threatened or near threatened. Road verges and hedgerows also provide vital corridors allowing wildlife to spread and thrive between larger areas of habitat and provide important benefits for people by buffering the noise, pollution and visual impact roads can have.

There are many potential threats to our roadside habitats including poor timing of works e.g. scrub removal during bird nesting period and lack of management leading to the deterioration and loss of open habitats such as wildlife flower rich grasslands.

Motorways and major A roads are managed by Highways England, most other roads within Somerset are managed by Somerset County Council. County Councils have a statutory responsibilities to help conserve

wildlife on road verges. SCC have adopted the Somerset Highways Biodiversity Manual for the management of road verges and Rights of Way, which sets out guidance for the protection of species and promotion of biodiversity along highways.

Somerset County Council owns only a few hedgerows, hedges usually belong to the adjacent landowner. If a hedgerow is causing visibility or access problems on a highway, or a Right of Way, the landowner will be asked to cut it. If it is not possible to get hedgerows cut in any other way, the County Council may take action. The County Council will take action in the case of emergencies such as wind fall blocking a highway.

Guidance for appropriate hedgerow and tree management is laid out in the Somerset Highways Biodiversity Manual. If you are concerned by the management of a roadside verge, hedge or tree you should contact the SCC ecologist for investigation.

Volunteer, Friends-of or advocate groups

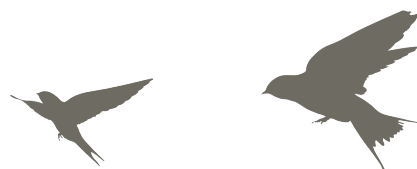
Sadly, sometimes the only reason for poor management or inaction is a lack of resources. Parks maintained as barren lawns, hedges flailed rather than laid or litter left to choke the countryside may all be down to time and cost rather than a lack of concern for wildlife. Where the relevant landowner or authority is unable or unwilling to improve the local area for wildlife grassroots community action can be a proactive way to work with them and enact real change for nature. Communities raising their voices together for nature – through social media, public consultations, local press and campaigns – will have a bigger impact than one lone voice.

Team Wilder provides support, resources and networking for community groups looking to take action for nature in their local area. We can support you to find your local group or start a new one!

Writing to your MP

You can ask your MP to help stop the loss of wildlife at both a local and national level. Not only do they want to hear from you, they also have a duty to listen – their job is to represent you in Parliament!

To make your visit, letter or email as successful as possible, make sure you have some clear things to ask your MP to do for you, and make your letter personal. Speaking about your personal experience will always have more impact than sending a template letter, but template campaign letters can be a handy starting point.



Further references

Find out more about Team Wilder, a movement for nature's recovery:

somersetwildlife.org/get-involved/team-wilder

Wildlife crime, UK wildlife law and EU wildlife law

wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-crime

Somerset Pollinator Action Plan

somersex.gov.uk/waste-planning-and-land/biodiversity/#Somerset-Pollinator-Action-Plan

Somerset Highways Biodiversity Manual

somersex.gov.uk/waste-planning-and-land/biodiversity/#Downloads

The Good Verge Guide

plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/publications/good-verge-guide-different-approach-managing-our-waysides-and-verges

20 actions parish and town councils can take on the climate and nature emergency:

policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/reports/20-actions-parish-and-town-councils-can-take-climate-and-nature-emergency

6 tips for engaging with your local councillors

ramblers.org.uk/news/blogs/2018/april/six-tips-for-engaging-with-your-local-councillors.aspx

Find your MP

theyworkforyou.com

Top Tips

Do your research. An emotive letter or campaign that fails to get the facts right will not help your case. Make sure you are aware of the laws, who to contact and make sure your appeal is clear and factual. Occasionally, with the best of intentions, people can place public pressure on councils, charities or landowners to take action in a way that would actually be detrimental to wildlife. This can be a significant drain on resources and confusing for other members of the public. Unless a wildlife crime is taking place you should always attempt to engage with the relevant landowners and authorities first.

Be persistent but polite. You may not always see the action you want, or as fast as you would like. It is utterly heart-wrenching to watch an environmental injustice take place, but staff are often juggling many priorities and can only work within the law and remit of their organisation. Keep your interactions polite and impersonal, but don't give up!

Post with care. Social media can be a force for good and effective way to galvanise support for your cause. However the fast and global nature of social media means that a post can rapidly lose its message to the detriment of your campaign and everyone involved. Consider carefully where, what and how you post. Keep your message factual and use images wisely.