



## **GILLINGHAM TOWN COUNCIL**

The Town Hall, School Road, Gillingham, Dorset SP8 4QR

### **Pollinators' Action Plan Policy 2022 to 2027**

#### **1. Introduction**

Bees and other pollinators are essential to food production and therefore to our lives. We are now very much aware that the bee population has been declining at an alarming rate in recent years due to a range of factors and that we must all work together to reverse this decline.

Gillingham Town Council is committed to becoming a 'Bee Friendly Town' by managing its open spaces, planted areas and cemeteries to protect and enhance pollinator habitats and species.

Pollinators need our help and that is why we have produced this Pollinators' Action Plan.

#### **2. Why are pollinators so important and what are the issues?**

There are over 1,500 species of insect pollinators in the UK, including bumble bees, honey bees, solitary bees, hoverflies, wasps, flies, beetles, butterflies and moths. All have complex life cycles and specific needs, including food in the form of pollen and nectar and somewhere to shelter and build a nest.

Dorset County Council has approved a set of principles for delivering its services and managing its assets in ways that minimise harm to these important species and enhance their natural habitats.

Pollinators – which include bees, hoverflies, butterflies and moths – are essential as they help wild plants and commercial crops to grow. The number of insect pollinators is highest in the summer coinciding with peak plant growth and supplies of nectar and pollen. Their value to the UK economy has been estimated at more than £400m a year. This is particularly important in Dorset, with its large farming sector and abundance of diverse and wildlife-rich landscapes.

However, pollinators are in decline not just in the UK but worldwide. Threats to their survival include habitat loss and degradation, pests and diseases, climate change and the use of pesticides. These include neonicotinoids, the most widely used insecticides in the world, which have been linked to the decline of pollinators.

At least 1500 species of insects pollinate plants in the UK. As a result of the way the landscape has changed over the last 50 or more years, not all insect pollinators can readily find the food and shelter they need.

The Town Council's Pollinator Action Plan will help to address this and shows that by taking a few simple actions we can meet Bees' Needs – [www.wildlifetrusts.org/bees-needs](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/bees-needs).

The Town Council's action plan consists of a range of principles that will be adopted for all relevant projects, plans and decision-making processes, both now and in the future. Actions cover areas of public open space, planted areas, cemeteries, playing spaces, grassed verges and allotments where the use of neonicotinoids and other harmful chemicals will be banned and the planting of more pollinator-friendly plants will be actively encouraged.

### **3. The Town Council's Pollinator Pledge**

#### **3.1 Plant bee-friendly flowers, shrubs and trees.**

All these things provide nectar and pollen throughout the year. It is essential to have flowering plants rich in pollen and nectar from February through to October with no gaps. Refer to The Wildlife Trust's 'Planting for Bees' guide for more information.

#### **3.2 Create and protect meadows and other areas rich in wild flowers.**

Sow wild flower seeds, leave flowers to set seeds before cutting or removing.

#### **3.3 Let it grow wild.**

Native flowering plants in grassed areas, support the greatest diversity of insect pollinators by providing nectar and pollen resources, places to nest or breed and leaves for caterpillars. Specified areas will be cut less often to optimise conditions for pollinators. Where possible, cutting will be avoided until after September as this will help to protect bumble bee nests in those areas. It will also help the caterpillars nesting there to survive until next spring.

#### **3.4 Don't be too tidy.**

Identify and protect existing patches of natural and semi-natural land to allow wild flowers, shrubs and trees to flourish, providing places for breeding and nesting, as well as food sources for pollinators. Manage existing mixed species woodland by coppicing and thinning to provide food sources such as brambles and wild roses, and nesting places for pollinators. Creating wide sunny rides and other open areas in woodland allows wild flora to grow and creates good conditions for foraging pollinators. Build more bug hotels.

#### **3.5 Don't disturb insect nests and hibernation spots.**

It is important to make sure pollinators can nest in safety so that they and the next generation can survive over winter, to start again in the following spring. Some bumble bees nest underground in small mammal holes, under sheds and in heaps of compost or leaves which tend to be dry and dark. Others make nests above ground in thick grass or in trees. The many different species of solitary bees have particular nesting requirements. A few species will make their nests in lawns and many others favour bare patches of compacted soil, especially if sloping and with a southern aspect, where they can dig vertical nest tunnels.

### **3.6 Think carefully about whether to use pesticides.**

Only use pesticides in exceptional circumstances and think carefully about the use of herbicides – consider all the alternatives and only use where absolutely necessary.

## **4. Action Plan**

### **4.1 Grassed Verges**

All the grassed highway verges in the town are the responsibility of DC Highways but are cut under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) by the Town Council. The minimum regime for cutting stipulated in the SLA is seven cuts per year. The Town Council has been cutting a lot more frequently than this due to requests by residents to keep the grass short. From April 2017 the Town Council has been managing all its areas of public open space which were once contracted out to Dorset Countryside and this increase in grass cutting may result in the frequency of cutting the grassed verges being reviewed. A reduced cutting regime will clearly be of benefit to the bee population.

### **4.2 Planted Areas**

The Town Council is responsible for the planted areas in the town and will source where possible plants that are especially liked by bees and other pollinators.

### **4.3 Public Open Spaces**

The Town Council is responsible for 27 hectares of public open space. The majority of these areas are under 0.19 ha. There are 14 areas which cover 0.20 ha or more.

The cutting regime for the smaller areas will be reviewed to see whether it is possible to improve their biodiversity potential.

For the larger areas of public open space there is more scope to leave some areas of grass uncut and over a period of time to introduce a greater variety of grasses, to plant more trees and shrubs, to create b-lines to link with other sites and to generally improve the overall biodiversity of our open spaces. The management plans and the biodiversity action plans for our open spaces specify the areas where this can be achieved and reflect the Town Council's commitment to improve the natural environment of these sites.

### **4.4 Cemeteries and St Mary's Church Yard**

A section of the cemetery and church yard is left for wildflowers and grasses to flourish and will be cut twice a year. It is not unusual for cemeteries to be left as havens for wildlife.

### **4.5 The Garden of Remembrance**

This area has a lot of well-established ornamental trees. It is a 'closed' cemetery and an area used for quiet reflection. A plan has already been agreed for part of this public open space to be planted as a 'Butterfly Garden', which has been funded from a successful grant award from Tesco Bags of Help.

#### **4.6 Playing Spaces**

These areas have little scope for biodiversity improvements. If the areas are not tarred the grass has to be kept short. These areas are litter picked and the rubbish from litter bins collected daily.

#### **4.7 Community**

All Town Council staff and councillors will be made aware of the importance to encourage and protect pollinators and provided with the necessary information to review management strategies.

The Town Council will engage with other organisations in the town, such as the Allotment Association, the Town Meadow Group, Friends of Gillingham Station, the Parish Church, local businesses, schools etc., to promote bee friendly strategies and reduce pesticide use.

The Town Council will request that landscaping designs, which will form part of new housing or commercial developments in the town, are planted with pollinator friendly plants that will provide a food source from February through to October.

The Town Council will engage with other local authorities and environmental bodies to support new projects and activities which will benefit pollinators.

### **5. Review**

The Pollinators Action Plan was presented to the Finance and Policy meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022, for approval and adoption and ratified at the Full Council meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2022, minute no. 770d

**Signed:**  
**Mayor of Gillingham**

**Date:**