

Agenda Item:

Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee/ Cabinet

Insert
Item
No.

Dorset County Council



Date of Meeting	15 June 2016 and Cabinet 29 June 2016
<u>Cabinet Member(s)</u> Peter Finney – Cabinet Member for Environment	
<u>Local Member(s)</u> All	
<u>Lead Director(s)</u> Mike Harries – Director for Environment	
Subject of Report	Dorset County Council Action Plan for Pollinators
Executive Summary	<p>Insect pollinators play an essential role in providing pollination services for many commercial crops and wild plant species, services which represent significant value to the UK economy, estimated at over £400 million annually. With a significant agricultural sector, and extensive natural and semi-natural habitats within which pollinators are important, it is likely that Dorset receives a disproportionately high share of this economic value. However, pollinators such as bees, hoverflies, butterflies and moths are in decline. Pressures such as habitat loss and degradation, pests and diseases, pesticide use and climate change individually and in combination are having negative impacts on populations and, as a result, reducing their ability to provide valuable services to human populations.</p> <p>It is proposed that Dorset County Council should help to reduce this decline and where possible enhance populations by adopting an Action Plan for Pollinators, in line with similar plans adopted by other public bodies. This will specify the principles by which Dorset County Council will seek to deliver services and projects at an operational level in a way that maximises positive impacts and minimises negative impacts on pollinator species. The Action Plan proposes a range of positive principles which can be applied to the management of County Council assets, projects and decision-making processes, as well as a prohibition on the use of neonicotinoid pesticides, which have been linked to the decline in pollinators, on County Council land where the power to enforce this exists.</p>

Impact Assessment:	<p>Equalities Impact Assessment: With reference to DCC equality impacts guidance, there are no equalities impacts issues identified for individuals with protected characteristics relating to the subject of this report.</p>
	<p>Use of Evidence: A variety of Government and scientific papers have informed development of the proposed Action Plan, as well as the views of both the Country Parks Liaison Panel and the County Farms Liaison Panel (see background papers listed below).</p>
	<p>Budget: there are no budget implications associated with adoption of the proposed action plan for pollinators. No increases in existing budgets are envisaged in delivering actions from the Plan, indeed, there is potential for some savings to be made.</p>
	<p>Risk Assessment:</p> <p>Having considered the risks associated with this decision using the County Council's approved risk management methodology, the level of risk has been identified as: Current Risk: LOW Residual Risk: LOW</p>
	<p>Other Implications: There is wide public support for the protection of pollinators and agreement by Dorset County Council to do what it can to protect and enhance these insect populations would be viewed positively by many.</p>
Recommendation	<p>That the Cabinet be asked to adopt the proposed Action Plan for Pollinators, as set out in section 2 of this report having taken into account the views of the Committee.</p>
Reason for Recommendation	<p>The adoption of the proposed Action Plan for Pollinators will help Dorset County Council meet its aim of a 'healthy environment' as set out in the Corporate Plan 2016 outcome framework.</p>
Appendices	<p>None</p>
Background Papers	<p>What is causing the decline in pollinating insects? Living with Environmental Change (2014) The National Pollinators Strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England DEFRA (2014) Status and Value of Pollinators and Pollination Services, Report to the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (2014) Goulson, D. (2013) An overview of the environmental risks posed by neonicotinoid insecticides State of Nature (2013)</p>
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1. Background

- 1.1 Insect pollinators, which include species of bee, moth, fly, hoverfly, butterfly and beetle, are critical to Dorset's rich biodiversity and natural beauty, but they also play an essential role in providing pollination services for many commercial crops and wild plant species.
- 1.2 Insect pollination is extremely important to the UK economy, with estimated values ranging from £430 million to £690 million annually. As well as being important species in their own right, UK bees, both domesticated (honeybees) and the other 250+ species of wild bees and other insect pollinators are very important commercially, and are essential for the pollination of crops, such as oilseed rape, tomatoes, strawberries and apples.
- 1.3 However, pollinators are in decline, and the UK State of Nature Report 2013 showed that more than half of the bee, butterfly and moth species studied had declined in the last 50 years. Furthermore, in England the number of managed honeybee hives fell by about 50% between 1985 and 2005, and although there has been an increase in the popularity of beekeeping since 2007, many honeybee colonies are lost each year.
- 1.4 The decline in pollinator numbers can be attributed to individual and combined effects of a variety of pressures, these include:- habitat loss and degradation, pests and diseases, use of pesticides and climate change.
- 1.5 **Habitat loss** - A major driver of wild pollinator losses is thought to be the degradation, destruction and fragmentation of the many habitats in the landscape on which pollinators rely for food sources and breeding sites. The main causes of this change are more intensive agricultural practices and urban and sub-urban development of natural and semi-natural habitats.
- 1.6 **Pests and diseases** – bacterial infections and parasitic mites can result in the death of any bees, but especially colonial species including honey bee.
- 1.7 **Pesticides** – The increased use of pesticides in agriculture has raised concerns about the direct effects on pollinators, in particular the use of neonicotinoids. Neonicotinoids (neonics) are now the most widely used insecticides in the world. They are systemic pesticides which can be applied as a seed dressing (the preferred delivery mechanism in England) or spray. As they have high toxicity to insects they are considered by some to provide effective pest control.
- 1.8 The use of neonics as a preventative measure against insect infestation is, however, contrary to the long-established principles of integrated pest management where a variety of non-chemical controls may be utilised to reduce the potential for infestation such as biological control, habitat manipulation, modification of agricultural practices and the use of resistant plant varieties along with minimal use of pesticides.
- 1.9 Neonics are generally toxic to insects even in minute quantities, and recent scientific studies have demonstrated that they can persist and accumulate in soil, and can be found to be present in wildflowers and field margins as well as the crops for which they are intended. As they are water soluble they are also prone to leaching into surface waters such as streams and rivers, and into our groundwater. Most organisms inhabiting arable environments will therefore be exposed to them.

- 1.10 Much of the controversy over the use of neonics has focussed on their effects on bees. Neonics are routinely used on oilseed rape, maize and winter wheat, and these crops are major forage sources for both managed honeybees and wild pollinators in arable landscapes. Although there is little evidence for direct mortality in bees there is strong evidence for sub-lethal effects which reduce the ability to forage and navigate properly, impacting the viability of colonies. Research has also linked the decline of some aquatic insects, insectivorous birds and butterflies to neonics.
- 1.11 In December 2013 the European Commission therefore introduced a precautionary ban on the three most common neonicotinoid pesticides. The ban relates to use on crops such as oilseed rape and the sowing of dressed (treated) seed during spring and summer when bees are foraging. It allows continued use on crops less likely to be attractive to bees but does not take into account the impacts on other insects, aquatic invertebrates or birds. It is possible also for areas within Member States to seek temporary exemptions from this ban. The UK Government did not support the restrictions citing a lack of scientific evidence supporting a ban, but has implemented restrictions as required. The Government gave time limited permission to use neonics in July 2015 in four English counties, all in the east/south-east of England. However, they have recently, for the first time, ruled against the use of neonicotinoid pesticides in rejecting an emergency application from the National Farmers Union to treat a third of all Oilseed Rape Crops.
- 1.12 **Climate Change** - Insect and plant distributions have already been altered by recent climate change and the different rates of migration of plants and pollinators may lead to disruption of pollination. In addition, minor increases in temperature have interfered with the life cycles of some plants and pollinators making it less likely that plants will be pollinated.
- 1.13 It is possible for Dorset County Council to address pressures such as habitat loss and the use of pesticides. This could be done by changing and developing some of the ways we work. In particular, in our grounds services, Country Park management, landscaping, County Farms and Planning services.

2. Proposed Dorset County Council Action Plan for Pollinators

- 2.1 All local authorities and other public bodies have a legal duty, under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006, to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising their functions. Dorset County Council's Corporate Plan reinforces this duty by committing the authority to delivering a 'healthy environment' within its outcomes framework.
- 2.2 In managing Dorset's green spaces and providing ecological advice to a range of internal and external customers, Dorset County Council's Coast and Countryside Service already actively contributes to the protection and enhancement of pollinating insects. This has been done through the seeding of wild flowers along road verges, appropriate landscaping of highway developments and other land holdings, cutting and collecting verge arisings, protecting or creating new habitats linked to development planning conditions, and maintaining our Country Parks and Rights of Way in ways which are sympathetic to pollinators.
- 2.4 Given the pressures being experienced by pollinators throughout the UK and in Dorset, however, and the growing evidence that they, and the benefits they bring, (economic and environment) are at risk, it is recommended that we strengthen our commitment to a healthy environment through the adoption of an Action Plan for Pollinators.

- 2.5 The proposed Plan outlines how Dorset County Council will deliver services and projects at an operational level in a way that maximises positive impacts and minimises negative impacts on pollinator species.
- 2.5 The Action Plan consists of the following principles to be adopted with immediate effect, or to be applied to future projects, asset management plans and decision-making processes as and when they are developed and/or reviewed.
- Highway verges: in implementing the strategy agreed by Cabinet in 2014, the County Council will seek to extend the successful verge trials to become the operational norm. Under this model, cuttings are collected where practicable following mowing to reduce fertility and grass growth with the effect of allowing wildflowers to compete with grass for space to grow. Lower fertility verges will, over time, require less cutting, saving money and delivering a higher quality roadside environment. This will be coupled with the sowing of spring and late summer flowering wildflower seed where possible to benefit pollinators.
 - Green assets: Dorset County Council Country Parks, green spaces and other land holdings, will encourage the planting where appropriate of flower species and management of habitats that are beneficial to pollinators. Management Plans for such sites will make specific provision for pollinators and include measures to maximise pollinator populations.
 - Neonicotinoid pesticides: the County Council will prohibit use of neonicotinoid pesticides on County Council land where the power exists to enforce this. The only exception would be for County Farms where the terms of existing tenancies may prevent such a prohibition being applied. However, current tenants will be encouraged to comply on a voluntary basis, and to implement other actions which might benefit pollinators. The County Council's Environment Service, with input from the County Farms Liaison Panel, will also examine whether such a prohibition could be included in future tenancy agreements.
 - Planning and development: in discharging its functions as a planning authority, and in giving planning advice via its environmental advice services, the County Council will seek to ensure that pollinator habitats are protected and enhanced, and will require, where possible, that new development results in a net gain for pollinators in line with national and locally adopted planning policies.
 - Tree and shrub planting: where the opportunity arises, Dorset County Council will, through its arboriculture and Ranger services, endeavour to plant spring flowering trees such as cherry, apple, hawthorn, blackthorn and willow which will benefit pollinators.
 - Hedgerows: where consistent with the maintenance of good health and safety policy and in line with existing environmental land management agreements, the cutting of hedgerows will be carried out less often to allow longer flowering periods for nectar rich species.
 - Project development and delivery: the County Council will endeavour to ensure that planning for pollinators is considered at an early stage in any infrastructure projects (e.g. highway schemes) it develops, delivers or influences, applying lessons from the successful Weymouth Relief Road project as a model for how delivery of major infrastructure projects can enhance wildlife habitats.

- Research and evidence: the County Council will have regard to the latest scientific evidence on pollinator health and consider how respond to emerging research (e.g. on the impacts of light pollution on nocturnal pollinators) in its future decision-making, asset management and operational service planning.

2.6 It is proposed that the County Council's Coast & Countryside Service take the lead in ensuring that other County Council services are informed of the implications of this Action Plan, providing training and support where required to help services mainstream action for pollinators within their operational service delivery. It is further proposed that the Action Plan for Pollinators be kept under review, via periodic reporting to the appropriate Committee, to ensure that further opportunities to benefit pollinators are identified and pursued.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Dorset County Council's 2016 Corporate Plan recognises that Dorset's unique environmental assets underpin our economy and well-being and includes 'healthy environment' as an important element of our new Outcomes Framework. Key to a healthy natural environment are well-functioning ecosystems in which pollinators play a fundamental role. There is an opportunity for the Council to take a lead and do its part to protect and enhance pollinator populations in Dorset, and encourage partner organisations to do the same. Adoption of the proposed Action Plan for Pollinators will therefore reinforce Dorset's reputation for environmental leadership, delivering improved prospects for pollinators, whilst maintaining and increasing the many benefits which they provide.

Peter Moore
Head of Environment
June 2016