

Building Biodiversity
into local government practice

Practical ideas for incorporating biodiversity into local government services

Nottinghamshire Biodiversity Action Group

Nottinghamshire County Council

what is biodiversity?

Biodiversity is short for biological diversity, which means "variety of life". This refers to the variety of all wild plants and animals, and the places they live.

These habitats are not just wild spaces such as woodland, heathland and rivers, but can also include everyday places, such as roofs, schools grounds, business parks, etc.

Improving biodiversity means protecting and enhancing these species and habitats in everything we do, from small actions such as putting up bat boxes, to larger projects like setting up a community tree nursery.

This guide gives practical examples of things happening within local government in Nottinghamshire, handy tips to give you ideas to adapt in your own work area, as well as further contacts and sources of help.

...keep it local!



Have you ever stopped to wonder what makes Nottinghamshire so unique?

If you take a minute to look around you, you will notice that Nottinghamshire has its own characteristic landscapes that set it aside from neighbouring counties, such as Derbyshire and Lincolnshire. From the Idle Lowlands, through Sherwood Forest, to the rolling Nottinghamshire Wolds, Nottinghamshire is special.

The characteristics of our landscape in turn influence the habitats and wildlife it is able to support and, in order for us to retain local differences, it is important that we think about *local origin* when creating or enhancing our open spaces. When planting an area with trees or flowers, we need to ensure plants and seeds are of stocks that naturally occur in our local area so that they can continue to support our local wildlife. In addition, our local species are likely to have built up a specific genetic make up, enabling them to thrive in local conditions. For example, Nottinghamshire has a special hairy type of common heather. By introducing stock from an outside area the local gene pool will be diluted, which could render species susceptible to local pressures such as pollution or competition.

Roofers Go Wild at Kelham Hall

Kelham Hall, the headquarters of **Newark & Sherwood District Council**, is a listed building set in 42 acres of parkland. In 1999, the 'new wing' of the hall required urgent re-roofing works. The roof had suffered from leaks and tiles had blown off, endangering people using the main entrance and risking damage to parked cars.

The eaves to this part of the building support one of the largest colonies of nesting house martins in Nottinghamshire. In drawing up a re-roofing scheme the Council was keen to minimise any impacts on the birds.

The Council contacted the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust and English Nature for advice and commissioned an ecological survey to identify any impact upon protected species, and propose mitigation measures.


Kelham Hall

Evidence was found that brown long-eared bats were using the roof space as a roost. Bats are afforded greater legal protection than house martins and as such took priority in the drawing up of agreed mitigation measures with English Nature.

The re-roofing works were undertaken by a specialist contractor with experience of work involving bats. Works were delayed from July to September, to avoid conflict with the bats' summer roost. Access points into the roof were maintained to ensure the bats had continued use of the roof spaces once works were completed. In addition the type of roof lining materials used enabled bats to continue to roost.

Given that the house martins' breeding season extends from early April often to late September, it was agreed that meshing be temporarily placed over the eaves to prevent the birds nesting there. Only one third of the eaves were excluded at once, to ensure that the birds had opportunities to nest elsewhere in the building.



Following re-inspection of the roof space in early March 2002, evidence was found that bats had returned the summer following completion of the roof works. There has also be no noticeable impact upon the house martin colony.

This work demonstrates that the presence of nesting birds and roosting bats can easily be accommodated in renovation work, particularly if the needs of these species are carefully considered in the planning stage.



Top Tips to Benefit Biodiversity at Work and at Home

- **Use energy wisely.** Electricity production uses up resources such as coal and gas which are not renewable. Energy use contributes to climate change, which could have major impacts on our biodiversity, and to acid rain which damages habitats.
- **Use bat friendly chemicals** when treating timbers in loft spaces.
- **Leave some long grass and nettles** for insects to feed on, and to shelter other wildlife. Nettles are the main food source for red admiral, peacock and small tortoiseshell caterpillars.
- **Use water wisely.** Many wetland wildlife sites are threatened by the abstraction of water for domestic and industrial use.
- **Use peat substitutes.** Peat bogs are among our most threatened habitats, and provide homes for many rare and endangered species. Most have now been destroyed or damaged by peat extraction.
- **Plant native British plants** that are naturally found in your area. These are much more attractive to bees and butterflies than exotics, and will encourage more wildlife into your garden. Many are available from local company Naturescape on 01949 860592.
- **Install bird and bat boxes,** and grow native climbing plants up walls and fences for nesting sites.
- **Use water-based preservatives** for fences/external timbers etc.
- **Buy locally produced charcoal** - contact Nottinghamshire County Council on 01623 758231 or Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust on 0115 958 8242.
- **Create a garden pond**, designed with wildlife in mind.
- **Reduce the amount of water required** by your garden or landscape scheme. Plant species tolerant of dry conditions and use rainwater collected in a water butt to fill your pond and water your plants.
- **Use environmentally friendly pest control methods** rather than chemicals. Pesticides can kill beneficial insects such as bees and ladybirds as well as pests. Give space in your garden to natural predators and let them do the work for you.

(Landscape) Character Building!

Mansfield District Council has been leading the way at **Oakham Business Park** using the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) to design a planting scheme for the site. Planting will concentrate on the use of characteristic Sherwood species, which include native mixed hedgerows, holly, heather, gorse, Scots pine, oak and birch.

The Nottinghamshire countryside has a rich and diverse character that is often under appreciated. It includes the oak forests, heathlands and pine plantations of Sherwood; the coalfields and mining settlements of D.H. Lawrence country; and the pastures of the Wolds and the Vale of Belvoir.

It is the complex interaction of the natural components of our environment (the influences of geology, soils, climate, flora and fauna) with the cultural components of our environment (the historical and current impacts of land use, settlement and enclosure) which gives our environment its local character and sense of place.

Character is defined as a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements within the landscape that makes one area different from another.

Whilst both the rural and built environment are in a constant state of change there is a need to safeguard the elements that contribute to diversity and distinctiveness. The conservation, enhancement, and restoration of the natural and cultural environment should be fundamental to any future change within our landscape by responding appropriately to biodiversity, the historic environment and landscape issues.

Further information on the 10 different Regional Character Areas and their landscape types that occur within the county are found within the Nottinghamshire Landscape Guidelines available by telephoning (0115) 977 2156.







for wildlife

These stories illustrate how the grounds of buildings can contribute to biodiversity conservation. The type of actions, however, can be applied to all sorts of grounds - in public and private ownership - and some actions actually involve doing less rather than more!

Less is More!

In the north of the County at Langold, the **Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust** is working with **Langold Infant and Junior Schools** to restore an area of botanically-rich grassland around the edge of the schools' playing field, which is bordered on three sides by **Dyscar Wood Nature Reserve**.

Previously the whole field had been mown many times a year, but a more favourable regime has now been introduced. This allows plants, such as the bee orchid, to flower and set seed and is better for invertebrates. The meadow is now cut once a year in late summer, and the hay removed. Not only have the schools played a major part in this transformation, but the Probation Service has also helped out with clearance of invasive scrub and litter.



Creating Outdoor Learning Spaces



School grounds have tremendous potential to be developed as wildlife areas, bringing benefits to local wildlife and extending learning opportunities well beyond the classroom.

The Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust works with a number of schools each year to develop 'grounds greening' projects designed to improve wildlife habitats and create new 'outdoor classrooms'. In **Clifton**, **Nottingham** the Trust has been working with staff and pupils at **Whitegate School** to transform an area cleared following the demolition of a number of old classrooms into a wildlife area complete with a pond and bog garden.

This project has generated support from the local community and has attracted grant funding as well as financial support from local companies. The wildlife area now forms a natural link with Glapton Wood, a Trust nature reserve adjacent to the school grounds.



partnership in practice

Have you tried working with other people? There are often budding volunteers out there who are willing to get involved in issues affecting their local area.

This type of partnership will benefit a variety of local authority departments, including housing, property and estates, planning, nature conservation and schools.

Contact the Biodiversity Action Group for possible help, advice and partnership potential: (0115) 977 4213 or www.nottsbag.org.uk



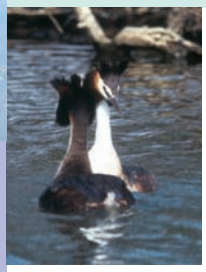
Whitegate School

Gone Batty

Another way in which school grounds can be improved for wildlife is through the installation of bird and bat boxes within the grounds and on school buildings themselves. At **Nethergate School in Clifton** the **Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust** organised a series of activities to encourage staff and pupils to do more to help bats and birds.

A special 'meet a bat' session was organised in conjunction with the **South Notts Bat Group**. This gave pupils an opportunity to meet live bats and to learn about their needs and the reasons for putting up boxes. The Trust then arranged a 'Box Building Day' for Key Stage 4 pupils. This provided the children and their teachers with the necessary skills and information they needed to construct a range of nest boxes and feeders. The boxes made during the session and at subsequent events have now been installed in the school's grounds.





Aggregate Partnership Adds Up to Community Benefit

Attenborough Gravel Pits have long been recognised both as a valuable area for wildlife and as a significant amenity for people. The site is arguably the best wildlife site in the Borough of Broxtowe, and attracts a large number of visitors throughout the year. In 1982 the site was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), due to its importance for over-wintering wildfowl. Since recording began in 1944, over 250 species of birds have been sighted, including the elusive kingfisher and the nationally rare bittern. Recently, otters have been recorded in the area, and it is hoped that they will establish a breeding population in the future.

Almost three years ago, **Broxtowe Borough Council** entered into an agreement to share the cost of maintaining the Barton Lane car park as a public amenity with the owners **RMC Aggregates (Eastern) Ltd**. This first step led to the development of an innovative partnership, improving access and enhancing the wildlife potential of the area.

Following work by the Borough Council, disabled access has been significantly improved, along with footway and bridleway surfacing work. Plans for interpretive panels to explain the wildlife value of the area, plus a wider network of quality paths to help people explore the site, are already underway. Most of this work has been delivered using the ILM (Intermediate Labour Market) team run by **Groundwork Ashfield and Mansfield**. The team consists of long term unemployed people who use the project to gain the skills needed to obtain employment.

Working with RMC, the **Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust** has attracted external funding to manage the site for nature conservation, linking in with the Local Biodiversity Action Plan priorities for Nottinghamshire. Trust staff and volunteers have been involved in restoring and creating new habitats to enhance the value of the pits for wildlife. Other organisations, such as **Groundwork Greater Nottingham** and **BTCV** have undertaken specialist areas of work like willow spiling, involving the community and enthusing local people. A new Visitor and Educational Resource Centre is being built on site, which will encourage further use of the area for study and pleasure.

The work at Attenborough is an excellent example of major partnership working bringing together funding and expertise to deliver improvements that will benefit both the community and its biodiversity.



biodiversity action planners!

Planners can make a significant contribution to achieving biodiversity targets through both their forward planning work and their development control function. The following hierarchy of principles should be used throughout the development control process, in descending order:

i) enhancement of the environment
ii) avoidance of damage to the environment
iii) mitigation of damage to the environment
iv) compensation for damage to the environment

Incorporating biodiversity into planning has benefits all round. Often planning regulations can seem to be very restrictive, but these two examples show that this does not have to be the case.

Raising Beds Opens Doors

An innovative partnership project to widen access to the **Rushcliffe Country Park Community Tree Nursery** has attracted funding from the **Nottinghamshire Biodiversity Action Group**.

The tree nursery was set up to grow trees to be used within Rushcliffe Country Park, Ruddington. The nursery is managed by park rangers, who work with volunteers to collect local seeds and grow them up into saplings. The park currently has a Countryside Stewardship agreement in place, and the majority of the trees, which include hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel and wild privet, are used for filling gaps in hedgerows, an important habitat for plants and animals.

Angie Forman, Assistant Ranger at the Park, explains why the project is so important: "The original nursery was not very easy to get around, with uneven grass and muddy paths. By installing 2 raised beds, level paths and a new gate, we have made the nursery more accessible to people with mobility problems."

Safe, easy access is an important issue for many of the groups that volunteer at the nursery. Some of the key volunteers for the project are members of the **Horticultural Group** from **Rushcliffe Resource Centre**, a **County Council** day care centre for people with physical and learning disabilities. Volunteers came up with the idea of applying for funding, and have been involved in working on the project every week.

Other groups have also worked on the nursery, and include Friends of Rushcliffe Country Park, South Nottinghamshire College, and Reparation, a scheme for young offenders. In the summer, volunteer numbers are swelled with brownies, cubs and school groups, and the general public are encouraged to get involved on volunteer days, where they can participate in seed collection and planting.

New Park for Business and Biodiversity

A former hospital site on the edge of Mansfield, **Ransom Wood Business Park** lies within extensive grounds of landscape and wildlife interest. It includes part of the Rainworth Forest SINC (Site of Importance for Nature Conservation), and also features on the Heathland Register. In addition, Ransom Wood is partially covered by a Tree Preservation Order. These three special features give the site a countywide importance.

Aware of its importance, pressure for development and the aspirations of the owner, **Mansfield District Council** commissioned a detailed habitat survey, working with the owner, to identify the relative ecological importance of the different habitat types. This information has guided the preliminary plans for development, the first phase of which has started.

The ecologists digitally mapped the different habitat zones onto a 1:1250 base plan and assessed their relative local and regional importance. The site was found to contain oak-birch woodland and heathland habitats, which are both priority Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) habitats, and the principle of excluding these areas from development has been followed in the preliminary plans. The areas considered to be of lowest ecological value are those of coniferous plantation, scrub, ornamental planting and lawns. The preliminary plans show the new office development focused on these areas.

It is intended to continue working with the Business Park to ensure protection and management of the key habitats and species, and to seek enhancement of other areas - for example, conversion of coniferous blocks to oak-birch woodland, and scrub areas to heathland. A management plan for the whole site will be produced to guide both the Park's business and ecological development.

grow your own!

The concept and practice of growing and using plants of local origin is of relevance to landscape architects, schools, grounds / landscape managers, countryside managers and rangers, parks and gardens staff, community development workers, staff working with trainees and social services clients in horticulture, etc. and tree officers.

Meeting a Growing Demand
Skegby Horticultural Unit

Trainees at the County Council's Horticultural Unit at Skegby have been involved in an innovative local origin project, which has resulted in an award in recognition of their "Outstanding Contribution to the Creation of the Greenwood Community Forest".

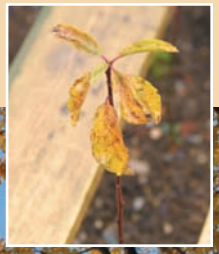
The project has enabled trainees to collect native seeds from local woodlands and grow them into trees, which have then been planted around the county to create new woodlands and landscaped areas.

The unit is run by the County Council's Social Services Department, and aims to support local people with learning difficulties whilst they gain the confidence and skills required to move into employment.

Martin Vindelis, Day Centre Officer, explained why the project had proved to be so popular. "Seed collecting is just like going for a nature walk, and gives trainees the opportunity to get out into the countryside and learn about their environment." Seeds have been successfully collected from a number of native trees, including oak, beech, silver birch, field maple, holly and yew. "Being involved in all parts of the process, from collecting to planting up and potting on, trainees can watch the results of their efforts as the seeds grow, and learn practical skills which can be transferred into the workplace".

Since the Unit opened, they have managed to grow over 4000 saplings, which are in great demand. Trees have already been bought by the County Council's Environment Department and local golf clubs, as well as by the Greenwood Community Forest team, for use in creating and enhancing local woodland.

The following examples show how local authorities have been working to promote local provenance within their own area, and how they can help other organisations gain access to suitable stock.

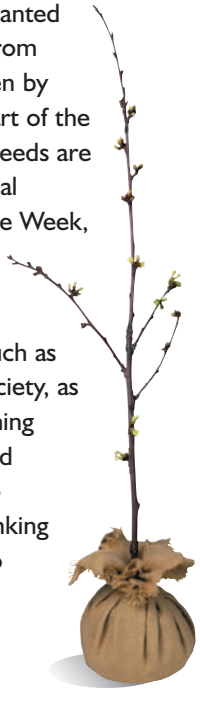




Collecting Seed for Local Need
Bulwell Community Tree Nursery

In 1997, **Nottingham City Council** set up their own tree nursery situated in the grounds of **Bulwell Hall Park**. The site is managed by BTCV for the growing of local origin native trees, although plans are afoot to extend the species list by adding local origin shrubs and wildflowers too.

BTCV works with the City Council to encourage volunteers from local schools and community groups to participate in every aspect of growing and caring for the plants, which will eventually be planted in and around the City to enhance the environment. Apart from regular maintenance of the site, special events are undertaken by volunteers throughout the year. Seed collecting is a major part of the calendar, with the thrust of the work during autumn, when seeds are processed and sown on site. Events are linked in with national promotions such as Seed Gathering Sunday and National Tree Week, maximising publicity and generating positive PR for both the City Council and BTCV.



Volunteers, who have previously come from organisations such as the Sikh Group and Nottingham University Conservation Society, as well as from various local schools, can also benefit from training events run at Bulwell Hall Park, such as tree identification and organic horticultural techniques. In addition, the nursery also provides an educational resource for the local community, linking in with National Curriculum subjects ranging from science to numeracy and literacy.

Sources of Help

The following list aims to provide a starting point for further sources of help, and is not intended to be exhaustive.

Did you know that Nottinghamshire has a Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP), listing species and habitats of conservation concern across the county? The LBAP contains targets and actions to help all organisations to work towards protecting and enhancing our local biodiversity.

For more information and advice on biodiversity and the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, contact:
Beth Gardner, Biodiversity Officer
Biodiversity Action Group Tel: (0115) 977 4213
e-mail: beth.gardner@nottscc.gov.uk or visit our website at www.nottsbag.org.uk

Local Contacts

The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
Tel: 0115 931 3316
BTCV runs a programme of practical conservation activities and training courses for volunteers.
e-mail: d.york@btcv.org.uk
website: www.btcv.org.uk

Groundwork
Groundwork is a federation of Trusts each working with partners to improve the quality of the local environment, the lives of local people, and the success of local business.

Groundwork Ashfield and Mansfield
(01623) 635334
Groundwork Creswell
(01246) 570977
Groundwork Greater Nottingham
(0115) 979 9227
Groundwork Newark and Sherwood
(01623) 635334
e-mail: enquiries@groundwork.org.uk
website: www.groundwork.org.uk

Nottinghamshire Biological and Geological Records Centre
Tel: 0115 915 3909
The NBGRC holds all biodiversity records for the county, is part of a national network of county records centres, and runs the county SINC system.
e-mail: nbgrc@ncmg.demon.co.uk
website: www.nbgrc.org.uk

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust
Tel: 0115 958 8242
The Trust manages nature reserves, carries out education work, campaigns for wildlife and works to influence planning policies and decisions in the county.
e-mail: enquiries@nottswt.cix.co.uk
website: www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/nottinghamshire

Sources of Local Provenance Species

BTCV
Sue Brannan
Conservation Training Centre
Chestnut Grove, Burton Joyce,
Nottingham NG14 5DZ
Tel: (0115) 931 3316

Skegby Horticultural Unit
Skegby Lane, Skegby
Nottinghamshire
Tel: (01623) 559465

Naturescape British Wild Flowers
Maple Farm, Coach Gap Lane
Langar, Nottinghamshire NG13 9HP
Tel: (01949) 860592

Community Strategies

It is important that biodiversity is integrated into the Community Strategy process. The Biodiversity Action Group is working across all Nottinghamshire districts to promote this integration. The following publications contain more information on biodiversity and community strategies:

Engaging in the Process of Producing Community Strategies (Free) English Nature, RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts
Contact: English Nature
(01733) 455000

Natural Communities (Free)
English Nature, RSPB,
The Wildlife Trusts
Contact: English Nature
(01733) 455000

Useful Publications

Action for Wildlife
- the Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Nottinghamshire (£25.00)
Biodiversity Action Group
Contact: (0115) 977 4213

Biodiversity and Best Value
- helping to achieve continuous improvement for biodiversity conservation within local government (Free) Association of Local Government Ecologists
Contact: DEFRA (0117) 372 8817

Planning for Biodiversity
- good practice guide (Free)
Royal Town Planning Institute
Contact: (0171) 636 9107

Local Government Association
- Position Statement on Biodiversity (Free)
Contact: (0207) 664 3036

Biodiversity Checklist
- Developers' Guide (Free)
Cambridgeshire County Council
Contact: www.camcnty.gov.uk /sub/cntryside/biodiv/ccc/ devguide/dguide.pdf

England's East Midlands Wildlife
the Future you can help (Free)
East Midlands Biodiversity Forum
Contact: English Nature
(01476) 584800

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