

Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 there is a duty on public authorities in England, including Parish Councils, to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of their policy or decision making. This was further strengthened by the Environment Act 2021 so public authorities must now consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. This means a public authority must;

- Consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on their consideration.
- Act to deliver policies and achieve objectives.

Biodiversity refers to the variety of life on earth. Biodiversity is everywhere: in gardens, fields, hedgerows, mountains Rivers and the sea.

The Local Area

Sopley Parish Council is a rural village, with a considerable number of natural areas, including hedges, ditches, farmland, and the River Avon. In addition, just over a mile away from the village center is the New Forest National Park boundary.

Parish Council responsibilities

The Parish Council has responsibility for the following areas :- 1) the Cemetery on Ringwood Road, Sopley, 2) Shirley Common, (site with scientific interest), Burnt House Lane, Bransgore, 3) The Allotments for the Labouring Poor, Shirley, 4) Allotments at Heatherstone Grange, Mosquito Way, Sopley 5) Sopley Parish Hall land and their car park land and the 6) Harrison Memorial Garden, Priest Lane, Sopley and has responsibility for the cutting of hedges within the village.

What the Parish Council will do

- Consider the impact on biodiversity in the decisions made through the Parish Council, especially when commenting on planning applications.
- It will reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides used on Parish Council owned land.
- It will review how it manages the land at the Memorial Garden, Parish Hall car park and the Cemetery, this may include, but is not limited to.
 - Leaving standing and fallen dead wood as a habitat for invertebrates
 - Leaving leaf litter and dead vegetation wherever possible as a habitat for invertebrates
 - Removing invasive and non-invasive species that are detrimental to native flora or fauna as required.
 - The Parish Council will consider reducing the number of cuts in the Cemetery and Shirley Common allowing the grasses to grow and be swathed in September.

- The Parish Council will
 - Ensure that there is a margin of uncut grass around the hedges to allow longer grasses to grow.
 - Allow fallen tree branches to remain, if safe, to allow invertebrates to habitat.
- Hedge cutting takes place as necessary and is very much a balancing act as the Parish Council hedges run alongside narrow, well-used footpaths so require cutting. All hedges are cut outside of the bird nesting season.
- The Parish Council will look to purchase and install bird boxes in the Parish Council owned trees.
- The Parish Council will look to promote biodiversity via the Parish Council website.