



## **WARNDON PARISH COUNCIL**

Minutes of the Annual Parish Open Meeting held at the Lyppard Hub, on Wednesday 18 May 2022, at 7.30 p.m.

**Present:** Cllrs D Carney, A Cross, D Merriman, A Taylor, A Roberts (County Councillor), Michael Lomax (Parish Warden), Warwick Neale (Worcester City Council), Neil Jones (Worcester City Council), Claire Neville (Worcester City Council), Paul Snookes (Worcester Environmental Group), Liz Yorke (Worcestershire Wildlife Trust)

**In attendance:** the Clerk, twelve members of the public

**Apologies** were received from: Cllrs L Hodgson, S Hodgson, R Norfolk (attended remotely)

### **What can Warndon Parish Council do to help address the Biodiversity Crisis?**

Liz Yorke of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust (Wild Worcester) addressed the meeting on the subject of biodiversity, why it is important, and how communities and individuals can help. The presentation highlighted the work of local community groups such as the Canal & Rivers Trust, the Canal Corridor Project, the WEG and the Newtown Green Community Group.

Liz Yorke (Wild Worcester) is funded by the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, with the aims of engaging communities in acting for nature and encouraging children and teenagers to participate in wildlife education programmes. The Trust is currently applying for Heritage Lottery funding to expand its activity range and sponsor more engagement officers.

The core aims of the Wild Worcester project are to:

- reconnect communities to nature
- promote biodiversity and nature recovery
- increase social inclusion and access to nature

Some points to note:

- there has been a 60% decline in the UK flying insect population
- there has been a 41% of UK insect species are facing extinction
- the populations of hedgehogs, water voles and swifts are also at risk

Based on background research, one in four people need to act to encourage nature recovery – which might include for example reducing mowing in gardens to encourage wildlife growth. The WWT can work with and alongside parish initiatives to achieve this goal. Questions are how can the WWT help and how is Warndon Parish Council (as a delegated authority) to maintain a biodiversity initiative in connection with Worcester City and County councils.

### **How can the WEG help?**

Paul Snookes of the WEG addressed the meeting and outlined how the group is working with the Parish Council, the City Council and the WWT. Currently a 12-mile wildlife corridor is being created around the city: the Wild about Worcester Way which encompasses the Mabbs Allotments and Racefield en route is being used as a model for what can be created on a grander scale. The Worcester City Conservation Team is working with WEG on various initiatives, such as installation of wildlife boxes, wildflower meadows, fruit trees, edible hedges, log piles and their beneficial effects for biodiversity.

### **Questions from the audience**

#### **1. Grass cutting services**

The issue of changes to grass-cutting practice in the parish was raised – parishioners have voiced concerns over the reduction of mowing services of grassed areas and verges which are making the parish look unkempt and untidy. With regard to biodiversity concerns, staged mowing practices are being trialled, i.e. cutting to within a metre of the verge on Dugdale Drive, and leaving long grass and wilding areas beyond to encourage a range of wildlife habitation. It was agreed that communication and consultation with parishioners is paramount in order to alleviate misunderstanding of policies and properly inform. WPC is empowered to consult and engage with parishioners but cannot over-extend its facility whilst under WCC remit. Social media is a useful communication tool, but other non-online dissemination of news and information is necessary to fully engage with the parish.

#### **2. Current state of health of wildlife in Worcestershire**

In response to the general question of existence of the various wildlife species, Liz York advised that parishioners can freely consult the nbnatlas website. Tapping in a postcode will produce species listings for whichever area.

#### **3. Wildlife watch in Warndon Villages**

The meeting questioned the idea of establishing a wildlife watch in the parish. Liz Yorke advised that a roving watch might be a more practical option. This is quite a big process and necessarily would need to engage numerous community hubs and volunteers. More investigation into the initiative is necessary before embarking on an official programme.

#### **4. Biodiversity corridors**

Can the parish open up biodiversity ‘corridors’ between the various ponds in the parish to facilitate wildlife access and expansion? The Neighbourhood Plan for the parish has to balance various needs

of parishioners e.g. recreation corridors/areas vs wildlife habitat corridors. Consideration needs to be given to how best meet all the various needs of parishioners and avoid clashes in policies.

## **5. Ponds**

There was further discussion on the matter of cleaning of the pond sites. A survey has already been done, which highlighted the need to be mindful of SSSI (sites of special scientific interest). Pond cleaning exercises may inadvertently transgress regulations concerning maintenance of such sites. Currently WCC is responsible for maintaining these sites and has a duty to consult on planning processes. The Parish Council can liaise with all residents/stakeholders in these sites, and perhaps set up a working group which will include parishioners. This is a valid process. On the question of who decides if a pond needs dredging and is responsible for the exercise, WCC and the Lengthsman service are currently engaged in this. The ongoing issue of unadopted land continues to raise questions as to responsibility for maintenance of communal areas, particularly in the north of the parish.

## **Parish Warden Service**

Mike Lomax (Parish Warden) advised that the service attends to general maintenance of communal areas within the parish – grass cutting, fallen trees etc. The service can be reactive and proactive depending on the matter at hand but would be greatly enhanced by collaborative efforts of councillors, officers and parish residents (e.g. former Friends of Warndon Villages group). WCC policy is currently encouraging community engagement and volunteer support, particularly where unadopted land is involved - where the City has no mandate to act. Currently the volunteer litter picking initiative has contributed much to general parish aesthetics.

## **Grants and funding**

Are any grants available for parishioners to plant for wildlife? The WPC has a grant fund policy which can benefit residents. However, these funds are not exhaustive and more sizeable funding is likely to be gained by applying directly to the City or County council schemes. Claire Neville (WCC) advised that the City Council Environmental grant scheme has been funding projects which directly benefit the environment – public gardens, tree planting, with grants of up to £1000 for suitable projects. The scheme will re-launch in September 2022.

## **Biodiversity net gain?**

Has the net gain benefit for biodiversity element of planning / development regulations become policy yet?. Cllr Taylor advised that the net gain benefit, according to government sources, will not be enforced until 2023. A 10% gain may be a prerequisite for the next 30 years. The South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP) will also include a biodiversity element.

## **Next steps**

Cllr Cross concluded that biodiversity in practice can often lead to ‘messy appearance of communal areas, and there is a need to change public perception in this regard e.g. explaining the benefits of maintaining scrubland and wildflower areas as opposed to solely neatly-trimmed verges and lawns in public areas to aid biodiversity.

Liz Yorke concurred that the message as to why wildlife is important and how biodiversity initiatives can be achieved with public engagement is paramount. The WWT 30 Days Wild annual nature challenge will be running through June 2022. Parishioners can visit the site and hopefully engage: <https://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/30DaysWild>.

The Parish Council could establish (in addition to online communications) a regular communication flyer to be posted directly through doors, if sufficient volunteers can be recruited to carry it out, and WPC will consider setting up a working group where residents can engage with initiatives and ideas.

Parishioners are encouraged to contact the Clerk in the first instance, with any concerns / ideas they may have about wildlife, maintenance or other related issues in the parish that they may wish to raise. All enquiries will be passed on to councillors as appropriate.

Cllr Cross thanked Liz Yorke for her presentation and parishioners for their attendance and encouraging response to the biodiversity initiative in Warndon Parish.

**Date of the next meeting:** Monday 6 June at 7pm

*The meeting closed at 8.30pm*

Signed: .....  
(Chair)

Date: .....