

Combe's Biodiversity Action Plans, April 2024

The Parish Council adopted a Biodiversity Action Plan for Combe in April 2024, and invited village organisations with a responsibility for managing property and land, however small, to contribute individual action plans. These are outlined below.

The Biodiversity Action Plan sits within the guiding principles on biodiversity and green spaces outlined in the Combe Village Design Statement. The aim is to raise awareness of threats to plants and wildlife, and the role that everyone can play in enhancing biodiversity.

Parish Council

Combe Parish Council is responsible for the maintenance of the public realm and green spaces throughout the parish. These include the village greens and roadside verges. It has responsibility to engage with other landowners and residents of the parish to encourage sensitive, environmentally sustainable practices.

The commitment of the Parish Council to conserving and enhancing biodiversity locally is detailed in the Combe Biodiversity Action Plan ([insert link](#)). In brief, actions include:

- Considering the potential impact of planning applications on biodiversity;
- The use of environmentally friendly practices, e.g. the review of chemical use in weed control;
- Sensitive mowing practices, with dedicated wildflower areas left unmown.
- Supporting village organisations and residents to enhance biodiversity, through its website and other communications.

Allotments

There are 24 allotment plots. Actions include:

- Planting to encourage bees, butterflies etc.;
- Leaving leaf litter and dead vegetation in designated areas as micro-habitats;
- Sympathetically maintaining hedging and leaving permeable boundaries for animals;
- Leaving some areas of grass unmown;
- Using environment friendly pesticides.

Combe Hub and Pre-school

The Hub and Pre-school occupy a small outside area, most of which is concreted. Pre-school also lease a small area of land around the Duke of Edinburgh oak tree from the Village Hall and Recreation Ground committee. Actions include:

- The use of picket fencing around the sites to allow small wildlife to move through;
- Pre-school children planting vegetables, salads and flowers, which are grown without pesticides;
- Planting to attract bees and butterflies (e.g. buddleia);

- Leaving a strip of unmown grass to encourage insects and wildlife;
- Installing a 'bug hotel' to encourage insects;
- Teaching the children to respect and promote biodiversity.

Going forward, Pre-school and the Hub will investigate the practicality of installing bird boxes.

Combe Primary School

The school occupies green spaces on the edge of the village. Actions include:

- Installing insect hotels;
- Leaving leaf litter and dead vegetation in designated areas as micro-habitats;
- Avoiding high levels of lighting;
- Having a school pond.

Over the next year, the school is planning to:

- Take part in the project 'FreshWater Watch';
- Undertake additional planting to encourage bees, butterflies etc.;
- Leave some areas of grass unmown.

Green Family Farm

The Green family farm about 200 hectares of land, which they rent from Blenheim Estates. The farm is now a member of Leaf and is audited by many organisations, including Red Tractor. Actions include:

- Designating certain areas of the farm for grass and wild bird and butterfly conservation;
- The river meadows are no longer cropped. A variety of plants are grown to provide wild bird havens and encourage a biodiversity of animals, insects and plants;
- Cutting the hedges less frequently;
- Growing many different crops, which contribute to biodiversity.

Michael Green has lived in Combe for his entire life, as have several generations of his family, and knows most of the areas of the parish. He would be pleased to meet any parishioners that might be interested, in the winter months when he is not so busy with the farming.

St. Laurence Churchyard

Planned actions include:

- Improving the structure and fertility of the soil in the borders in front of the church;
- Planting the borders in front of the church with mixed insect friendly herbaceous plants and shrubs;
- Implementing 'no mow May', where possible, given the constraints of burials;

- Considering the creation of a more biodiverse area of the churchyard, adjacent to the playing field wall, that does not impinge on burials.

The Reading Room

The Reading Room manages a Victorian property and small garden, with outbuildings, in the centre of the village. Actions include:

- Replacement of the outside security light with dark skies lighting that is more friendly to insects;
- Use of a garden waste bin;
- Use of a wildlife friendly solution to treat caterpillars attacking the box hedging in front of the building;
- Agreement that chemicals, such as Roundup herbicide, should not be used in the garden;
- The installation of a birdbox and hedgehog box.

Future steps include:

- Introducing 'no mow May' to encourage early flowers to provide pollen for insects;
- Continuing to plant flowers and plants in the garden to attract wildlife;
- Improving the recycling system in the kitchen;
- The installation of a bat box and insect hotel.

Village Hall and Recreation Ground

Current actions:

- A long strip of grass along the wall which borders Park Road has been left unmown throughout the summer. This is intended as a protected strip to act as a habitat and food source for insects and other wildlife;
- A section of border alongside the church wall has been left for local volunteers to nurture a wildflower zone;
- We have minimal lighting on our site. Lights to illuminate the path alongside the carpark are switched on manually rather than automatically. There is a security light at the pavilion which is motion-activated, with a relatively short activation time;
- While we must ensure that the grass surfaces of our playing fields are maintained to a standard that can support the football and cricket, we are committed to exploring all possible ways to ensure that this does not jeopardise the biodiversity of plant and animal life on our land.

Future actions:

- Install bird boxes in the copse to the East of the adult football pitch to encourage nesting birds;
- Install insect 'hotels';

- Develop further wildflower zones along the borders of our site to help support insect life. The bank to the north of the adult football pitch is currently prone to a recurring growth of brambles, so we intend to clear and eradicate these, and reseed the area with suitable grasses and wildflowers. A second area is the strip of grass to the East of the car park.

We will be raising funds specifically for these endeavours, and would value any expertise or assistance among villagers in securing grants and developing the site.