



East Hagbourne Parish Council

Climate & Biodiversity Strategy

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Summary/Abstract

Climate Change and Biodiversity are global challenges, but they can only be addressed if all levels of government and the community play their part. Net zero targets need action at national level to decarbonise energy supplies, but also for everyone in the community to play their part in adapting. Similarly, biodiversity is a complex challenge. Some species need very special habitats, but there are things we can do on a local level including in our own gardens. This strategy and action plan identifies the contribution we can make as a Parish Council and community. It outlines the actions which East Hagbourne Parish Council is committed to make in the areas of Parish Council activities, managing our own facilities and engagement with the community, to complement initiatives at District and higher levels.

1. Introduction

The problems of climate change and biodiversity loss are well documented. Climate change is affecting the world on a global basis, producing more extreme weather and disrupting the stable conditions farmers need to produce our food. The UK has lost half of its natural biodiversity since the Industrial Revolution, with climate pressures now adding to the effects of intensive agriculture and urbanisation. East Hagbourne Parish Council recognises the severe impact of human activities on our planet's climate and biodiversity, and commits to play its part in helping recovery through adoption of this Climate and Biodiversity Strategy.

The Climate Change Act 2008, updated in 2019, commits the UK to a 100 per cent reduction in carbon emissions, or net zero, by 2050. The Government's [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#) to achieve this was published in 2021 and outlines policies for emissions reduction in each sector. In October 2023, changes to some of these policies were announced, but the [2050 net zero target](#) and the ambitious interim target of [68% carbon reduction by 2030](#) declared in 2020 are retained.

With respect to biodiversity, [research by the Natural History Museum](#) has reported that the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, with half of its natural biodiversity lost since the Industrial Revolution. The [2023 State of Nature report](#) shows that this decline is continuing, with the abundance of those species studied declining by 19 per cent on average across the UK since records began in 1970.

The evidence from the last 50 years shows that the biggest impacts on our wildlife come from significant and ongoing changes in the way we manage our land for agriculture and the effects of climate change. But while the most important natural habitats are in poor condition, work to protect landscapes has been shown to have clear benefits for nature, people and climate.

The interdependence of these two challenges has led to the understanding that net zero and biodiversity are "[two sides of the same coin](#)".

In the UK, biodiversity is addressed by the Environment Act 2021, which prescribes legislation to protect and enhance our environment, as well as policies around waste and recycling, air quality and water resources. The Act places duties on government at all levels, including Parish Councils (see below).

South Oxfordshire District Council declared a climate emergency in April 2019, and in April 2021 declared an ecological emergency. They have set targets to be carbon neutral within SODC's own operations by 2025, and to be a carbon neutral district by 2030. SODC's [Climate Action Plan-2022-2024](#) sets out how the first of these objectives will be achieved.

The SODC approach to biodiversity has so far been less formal, but work has been done to reduce [grass cutting](#) in some areas under SODC control. Starting in 2022, grass in carefully selected areas was trialled with just one or two cuts at the beginning and end of the growing season, allowing wild plants and flowers to grow. In 2023, the "Let It Bee" project included eight sites across the district. There are also five designated areas in South Oxfordshire that are wildflower meadows where flower seeds are sown, with three cuts during the year. In areas where people exercise or relax the grass is kept short to ensure the areas are suitable and safe for public use.

A number of Parish Councils have also declared climate emergencies, often adopting the same ambitious net zero by 2030 target, exceeding the UK Government's ambition. As is to be expected, the actions taken vary according to the circumstances and needs of each parish, but a big question remains over how any council, at Parish or District level, can achieve net zero across a community, when that depends on the actions of households and individuals across those areas as well as changes at national level. The achievements to date, objectives and future plans for East Hagbourne Parish Council are set out in the following sections.

2. East Hagbourne Parish Council

Climate Change and Biodiversity are global challenges, but they can only be addressed if all levels of government and the community play their part. Net zero targets need action at national level to decarbonise energy supplies, but also for everyone in the community to play their part. Similarly, biodiversity is complex and some species need very special habitats. The challenge, therefore, is to identify what is possible and achievable for us as a Parish Council and community.

Our responsibilities as a Parish Council.

The Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Act, 2006 sets out specific powers that allow parish and town councils to encourage local people to save energy, including promoting and providing information and advice on locally available goods and services. This includes local production and efficient use of energy including microgeneration, the most obvious example of which is domestic solar power.

The UK Government, through Defra, has also issued guidelines for Parish Councils on [Ways to tackle climate change](#). Rather than prescription, this is guidance on what could be done, and some examples are explored in this strategy. Although our Parish Council operations generate less greenhouse gas emission than for larger councils, there are still opportunities for us to improve community facilities through our own activities including energy-efficient lighting, insulation and individual actions such as turning off lights and turning down thermostats. These are quick wins that all of us should take before considering more ambitious schemes like renewable energy.

Local councils are encouraged to take the message about climate change to the heart of their community. Planting trees and community woodland has a number of social and environmental benefits including helping to store carbon during the lifetime of the tree. Other areas for informing and encouraging the community, include sustainable travel, including cycling, buses, low emission cars and making life easier for pedestrians. There are many options, so we will need to focus our actions on what makes most sense for our community. We are encouraged to take action by being positive: to inspire rather than preach.

SODC also gives guidance and support on [what town and parish councils can do](#) highlighting the value of a Neighbourhood Plan, nature recovery plan, reducing our own carbon footprint, supporting local communities and pointing them towards sources of advice and funding.

The Environment Act 2021 sets out a [biodiversity duty](#) for local authorities, including Parish Councils. Public authorities who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity, with the first consideration of what action to take being done by 1 January 2024, and policies and objectives agreed as soon as possible after this.

The biodiversity duty calls on us to consider how the land we manage ourselves could improve biodiversity, but also to promote understanding of biodiversity and how we can support it in our own gardens and activities.

What has been done in East Hagbourne so far.

Climate change and Biodiversity feature strongly in the policies of the [East Hagbourne Neighbourhood Plan](#) :

SD1 encourages zero carbon development, provision of EV charging and reduced water use. VC6 calls for external lighting to avoid glare, disturbance to neighbours and nocturnal wildlife; Areas recognised for their scenic and wildlife value are recognised in Policies VC4 & E1; E2 requires development to respect the natural environment and biodiversity.

E3 aims to avoid flooding and requires that development should make proper provision for surface water drainage and use sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) where possible.

These provisions have been significantly strengthened and expanded by two new studies forming part of the 2023 update to the Neighbourhood Plan and which explain in more detail how the policy requirements can be met. A new [Design Guide and Codes](#) includes features to respect local village character and Codes encouraging good practice on lighting, walking and cycling, water management and eco-design. The Codes also give guidance on how to protect and enhance existing wildlife habitats and for development to enhance the green network.

The second major addition is a [Strategy for People and Nature](#) in East Hagbourne. It is a strategy for wildlife enhancement covering the whole of our parish over 11 countryside areas and the built environment, and builds on a 2020 review of wildlife assets in East Hagbourne based on local knowledge. It maps the most valuable existing areas for nature in our parish, reflects the value of our extensive footpath network and farming landscape, and identifies opportunities for trees, hedges, grassland, arable improvements, orchards, waterways, wildlife buffers and community engagement. Key conclusions have been incorporated into the Neighbourhood Plan through expansion of policy E2 to cover wider countryside areas that for protection and enhancement, incorporating the concept of biodiversity net gain. The Strategy provides measures for new development, but also guidance for managers and owners of the countryside on how to improve biodiversity while respecting the character of our landscape.

The new housing at St Andrews Crescent is on the site designated for development in Policy H3 of the Neighbourhood Plan. These homes are built with energy-efficiency and low maintenance living in mind and all come with underfloor heating and an electric vehicle charging point as standard. There is also a new cycle and foot access to the railway embankment and the area will be landscaped and planted. The need for future public EV charging is being monitored and a possible site at Windsor Crescent proposed to OCC.

The Parish Council is itself responsible for managing some areas of the parish. Butts Piece includes allotments and a "wild area" which is largely left to nature. The Recreation Ground has some fine trees and trials have been carried out to allow more grassland diversity.

Hagbourne and Upton Group for Sustainability [HUGS](#) is an active environmental group and the successor to Hagbourne Environment Group (HEG). HEG created the wildflower meadow at the cemetery and managed it for over 25 years as well as arranging work parties, particularly for hedge planting and looking after the "wild area" at Butts Piece. HUGS was formed in 2021 with a wider remit and has carried out an extensive programme since then. In addition to continued management of the wildflower meadow, major projects include the installation of owl boxes across the Hagbournes and Upton and supply of hundreds of trees/hedging plants for gardens and habitat improvement. HUGS has established a wildlife walk, helped restore the pond at Hagbourne School and provided education field sessions. Working with SOHA, HUGS has planted wildflowers and shrubs at Ryman's Crescent and Wilcher Close. HUGS has also worked with the Parish Council, planting new hawthorns along FP18, and managing parts of Butts Piece grassland for diversity, including the triangle.

[Moving to the next stage](#)

While much has been done, there are still many challenges and it is timely for East Hagbourne Parish Council to organise activities into a coherent plan. For the broader areas of climate change in particular, it is challenging to define suitable activities, because we lie between the big challenges that must be tackled at national level, and the contributions and choices we all have to make as individuals. This collaborative approach has already been used on wildlife projects as outlined above and has had considerable success. The recent discussions over grass-cutting highlight, however, that the way forward is not easy. In developing our approach we have been guided by the needs for our parish as we perceive them, however, we believe our actions and this strategy are fully consistent with our duty on biodiversity and the government guidance on climate change.

3. Our Strategy

It is helpful to structure areas of action into three main categories:

- Parish Council activities
- Managing our own facilities
- Involving the community.

As a smaller council, East Hagbourne Parish Council can not contribute as much as some through managing its own activities and facilities, but there are still significant opportunities.

However, climate change and biodiversity are challenges for the whole community, so we must encourage and help others to play their part, whether it is managing their own property and gardens, volunteering in the community or adopting new lifestyle choices. This is a bigger challenge and the Parish Council will not be able to achieve this alone: it will need the efforts and goodwill of other groups and individuals within and beyond the parish.

Parish Council activities

Encouraging walking, cycling and public transport is one factor that can reduce carbon emissions, so keeping our footpaths and footways clean, well surfaced and free of obstructions should be an objective, so that walking is safe and a pleasure. Our grass cutting contract covers surface vegetation along some paths, but regular attention may also be needed to twigs and briars coming from the sides or above, while still encouraging wildlife.

Two of the biggest regular expenditure items for the Parish Council are dog bins and grass cutting. A network of dog bins is available throughout the parish and it is pleasing to see that they are well used, although some dog owners still leave droppings in our public areas. Keeping our public spaces, footpaths and footways clean is another contribution to making walking a pleasure.

The Parish Council is responsible for cutting some, but not all, of the grass around the parish, and has supported some trials allowing grass to grow longer in order to encourage wild flowers, which provides experience for the future. Where grass is allowed to grow, it is important that end of season cuttings are removed from the site and disposed of properly.

[Plantlife](#) is a charity that works to protect wildflowers, plants and fungi. They have provided guidance on allowing grass to grow for wildlife including the "no-mow May scheme". They advise, however (see the last FAQ) that areas being restored for wildflowers may need more frequent cutting and removal of cuttings. Mowing can be less often and later following this restorative phase of management.

However, the sometimes competing demands of keeping the village smart and allowing a more relaxed approach to benefit nature are not always easy to reconcile. Our actions as a parish council depend on the support and enthusiasm of people across the community, so it is important that solutions are found that respect nature and also the views and well-being of residents. There are some areas along our footpaths and waterways that have the potential to be improved for nature while providing oases of beauty for people, so these objectives should not be incompatible.

In our fairly small parish, extensive tree planting does not seem viable, because it would impinge on high quality arable land and because the open nature of our landscape is a feature valued in our Neighbourhood Plan. All trees we plant will make a contribution to carbon capture, but the area we would need to completely offset our community emissions far exceeds what we have available. Where we can plant trees, these should be considered as assets for people and wildlife.

Gauging the demand for public Electric Vehicle charging is challenging, since most resident users will be able to charge at home, as will their visitors. According to OCC, the first priority should be to provide cost-effective charging for those houses that do not have off-street vehicle parking, which are principally Wilcher Close and parts of Main Road. A potential site

at Windsor Crescent has been proposed with this in mind. The situation is evolving: developments and demand for electric vehicle charging will need to be monitored in discussion with others including OCC and SOHA.

Managing Parish Council Facilities

The Allotments.

Gardens and allotments form an important network of wildlife corridors through our village. Allotment holders are expected to keep the land well manured and in a good state of cultivation and fertility, but there are opportunities to do this in a way that is more sympathetic to wildlife and the environment. The Parish Council can encourage good practice both for allotment holders and home gardeners.

The primary purpose of allotments is for growing fruit and vegetables, but they also provide healthy activity and social interaction and contact with nature, contributing to mental well-being. We are all aware today how the way we garden can have an impact on nature and the environment, and can all take action to minimise use of pesticides and other chemicals, mulching to reduce water needs and avoiding peat-based products.

Butts Piece and the "wild area".

The remaining part of Butts Piece has a grassy area for recreation, with picnic tables and an area of trees and scrub. This wild area was more actively managed by HEG volunteers some years ago with some areas cleared and trees planted that are now growing well, and pathways were cut through the scrub for walkers. Nature has now reclaimed much of this work and the area is largely impenetrable. There may be opportunities to make improvements that would benefit nature and people.

The central grassy area is primarily for recreation. A small border adjoining the wild area was left to grow in past years, but did not produce much diversity in flora, perhaps because of encroaching blackthorn and grazing by rabbits. Such experiences must be expected as we learn how to best manage our grassland, but the experience gained will be valuable for the future.

On the periphery of Butts Piece, the path leading up from Harwood Road has a verge cut regularly by the Parish Council, while the back vegetation opposite the wild area is left to nature and allowed to grow. The small triangle as the path leads towards Green Close again has a mowed edge to keep the footpath clear, while the central part is managed by HUGS who have planted wildflowers, which will develop over coming years.

The opposite side of Butts Piece, to the east of the public footpath (FP4) has also seen work by HUGS, planting a new native hedge by the field edge opposite the allotments and two elm trees reputed to be more resistant to Dutch Elm disease. This area bordering the footpath to Wilcher Close is left to grow, with comfrey and grasses providing shelter, and wildlife also found in the stream as it emerges from under the allotments.

East Hagbourne Pavilion and Recreation Ground.

The Recreation Ground at Great Mead is mowed regularly by the East Hagbourne Sport and Recreation Committee, who lease and manage the facility on behalf of the Parish Council. It is used for football as well as general play and dog exercising and has a children's play area that is well used by children from the village and further afield. The periphery provides a more natural environment with some fine trees, and brambles in some parts providing cover for wildlife and fruit for scavengers. It seems a generally good habitat for birds, with green woodpeckers being notable regular visitors.

Two small areas of grass were left to grow over summer 2023 as a trial to encourage wildflowers. The area created next to the football pitch seemed to contain little diversity, however an area next to the site entry already has diversity and seems worth continuing, particularly since this location does not interfere with activities on the main field. One aspect to be considered is the quantity of cuttings generated in areas where the grass is allowed to

grow all summer. It may be that alternative cutting schedules could allow plants to flower without producing what is, in effect, a waste product.

East Hagbourne Pavilion was built in 2014/15, so is built to modern standards with good insulation. Nevertheless, there are opportunities to look for improvements. The building is not open all day, but only when activities are scheduled. A gas heating system was therefore chosen, because it can rapidly warm up the rooms when needed. A seven-day timer is used to control the main Community Room, but it may be worth exploring more sophisticated controls. The lighting is fluorescent, so changing to LEDs could produce some reduction in energy use and carbon emissions.

The Cemetery.

The 'new' part of the cemetery on Main Road serves both East and West Hagbourne and is run by a committee of East Hagbourne Parish Council. The general environment here and in the 'old' part of the cemetery run by the Parochial Church Council is tranquil, with trees and a good habitat for wildlife. As a cemetery, the grass is cut regularly to preserve a respectful ambiance, but the rear half of the new cemetery that is not yet needed for burials is home to a mature wildflower meadow, started by HEG in the 1990s and managed today by HUGS. Overall, the site provides a wildlife-friendly environment.

Village Car Park.

The village car park, located at the Village Hall on Main Road is owned by the Parish Council. It is not intended for residents' parking, but for visitors and users of the village hall and is also used by school staff and parents dropping off children. In spite of an additional 20 spaces provided as part of the new St Andrews Crescent development it can be very crowded, especially at school times. For this reason, it is not considered a suitable location for EV charging at present.

A tall hedge along the eastern boundary provides shelter for birds. It is cut once per year at present, but can become overgrown and cause problems for car park users and neighbours.

The car park is lit by four central lights which were converted to LEDs a few years ago. It is perhaps worthwhile to review the timings for when these lights are on.

The Hopfield.

The Parish Council owns an 11acre (4.45ha) field to the east of Blewbury Road, bounded by Footpaths 17/16/19 and bisected by Hacca's Brook. The field lies on high grade arable land and is currently leased to a local farmer, producing an annual rent to the council. There may be opportunities for careful planting around the field, particularly along FP16 to support nature.

Our walking network.

East Hagbourne benefits from a very comprehensive network of public footpaths that provide walking opportunities both within the village and in the wider countryside. As well as recreation for people, the edges of many of our footpaths provide refuges for wildlife, and so form a valuable framework for wildlife corridors. The [Strategy for People and Nature in East Hagbourne](#), now part of our Neighbourhood Plan, includes a map of the more biodiverse locations and provides guidance for biodiversity enhancement that could be achieved while respecting the open nature of our countryside and the value of agricultural land. With more work and support of land owners, this could develop into a more detailed nature recovery plan.

Involving the Community

Climate change and biodiversity can seem complex challenges that require massive resources to address. While this is undoubtedly true, actions by governments and large organisations alone cannot tackle the problem. We all, as individuals, need to be part of the solution. Our actions and choices, while small individually, can together make an impact.

As the tier of government closest to local people, local councils are well placed to take the message about climate change and biodiversity to the heart of their community. Many parish

councils around the country have prepared climate strategies and plans, and their detailed actions and priorities vary greatly according to their own local needs and situation.

However, the basic question of climate change for us all as individuals is how we can reduce our energy use and greenhouse gas footprint in a way that is affordable for us. As a parish council we can lead through our own example and provide information, guidance and encouragement, helping people to make informed choices, building on guidance and support from [SODC](#) and others.

On biodiversity too, there is room for helpful information and guidance, to encourage people to value wildlife where we have it and to explain the challenges and impact caused by intensive farming. More importantly, our gardens, however small, form probably the most important wildlife corridor network in our parish and we can all help to make these areas wildlife friendly. Providing year-round habitats can be challenging, but we can all provide plants for pollinators, perhaps a bug hotel, bird box or even a small pond, with benefits for wildlife and ourselves, although we might need guidance on choosing plants that will survive the rigours of garden football.

Most important is the question of how the Parish Council engages with residents. Climate change and biodiversity are serious challenges, and many people are understandably anxious and call for immediate and drastic action. At the same time, people may have other life priorities or be struggling with living costs. The recent survey on grass-cutting showed clearly that people care about biodiversity, but that they also care about the character and appearance of our village. We are only likely to engage people if our efforts on climate and wildlife respect their views and the well-being associated with a cared-for environment.

In addition to individual householders, there are two groups of landowners who manage wider tracts of land. Firstly, a number of sites have been designated as Local Green Spaces or Assets of Local Distinction in our Neighbourhood Plan, which means they are places that have a special significance for the community and in some cases support good biodiversity. These sites are mostly in private ownership, which must be respected. Encouragement could be given, though, to these owners to enhance the value of the sites for nature. Some locations, including the SOHA land at Ryman's Crescent and Wilcher Close, and Didcot's Millennium Wood have already received such attention. There may be other non-designated sites which could also be improved.

The second important group is our local farmers who, in addition to producing high quality food, care for our wider countryside. The effects of intensive agriculture driven by society's demands for more and cheaper food are well documented, but there are signs that farmers are finding opportunities to allow nature into their operations where it can be done. In addition, the places where biodiversity is strongest in the parish are along footpaths, watercourse and field edges, so there is potential to gently expand these areas if farmers are willing and ways are found to make it practical within their farming operations. If we are to establish discussion with farmers, it is important that we try to understand more of the challenges and constraints under which they operate.

4. Our Action Plan

The challenges of climate change and biodiversity are great and involve all of us, from national level down to individuals. We as a parish council must focus on the areas where we can be effective. It will need long-term effort and be an ongoing process, so our Action Plan will evolve as we progress.

A. Managing Parish Council activities

1. Make walking safe and a pleasure by:
 - a. Keeping our village footpaths and footways clean, well surfaced and free of obstructions (both ground and overhead vegetation), while maintaining a green environment for people and nature.
 - b. Maintaining a comprehensive network of dog bins and encourage their use, to achieve no dog-fouling on any footpath, footway or public space within the parish.
2. Support the continued provision of a public bus service to Didcot and neighbouring villages.
3. Update our grass cutting schedule to reflect feedback from the 2023 survey. Use pesticides and herbicides only when really necessary.
4. Preserve the character and appearance of the village, while looking for targeted opportunities to encourage biodiversity. Learn from our own experiences and follow SODC guidance.
5. Use existing and new planters to promote plants beneficial to pollinators.

B. Managing Parish Council facilities

The Allotments:

6. Produce guidelines and expectations for our allotment holders to garden environmentally, minimise use of peat and pesticides, try to take a more relaxed approach to wildlife; ensure invasive or harmful species do not become a problem; use herbicides only when really necessary.

Butts Piece - wild area.

7. Review the condition of the wild area of trees and scrub and consider how it should be managed into the future.

Butts Piece - central grass and peripheral areas

8. Continue to manage the grassy area for recreation, but investigate whether selective tree planting, perhaps along the scrub line, could be acceptable to the site owners.
9. Maintain clear and well mown borders along the edge of all footpaths, but continue to reserve the borders behind on the east and west sides of the site for wildlife. Look for opportunities to improve key areas, particularly the stream as it emerges from under the allotments.

The Recreation Ground:

10. Manage the grassland, including the football pitch for amenity, but respect the borders and mature trees for carbon capture and wildlife.
11. Leave vegetation uncut to the left of the site entrance over the summer, demarcating by a 1 metre mowed border.; avoid waste dumping and remove longer cuttings off-site.

East Hagbourne Pavilion.

12. Review the facility's energy use and identify opportunities to reduce energy and greenhouse gas emissions through changes to heating, lighting controls, ventilation and operating procedures.
13. Review what is provided for users of the Pavilion and whether we could encourage less waste, including through providing robust glassware.

The 'new' Cemetery:

14. Manage trees for safety, but value the nature-friendly environment.
15. Support continued management of the wildflower meadow by HUGS.

Village Car Park.

16. Study the lighting schedules and energy usage for the village car park, street lamps and other areas. Reduce energy use where possible.

The Hopfield.

17. Discuss the current use of the land and options for peripheral tree/hedge planting, including along FP16, with the tenant farmer.

The Footpath Network:

18. Survey our wider footpath/bridleway network extending out beyond the village and identify improvements to make walking a pleasure while conserving and enhancing its value for nature.

C. Involving the community.

Although the actions in this section are few in number, they each carry great weight and are a most important part of the plan. Climate Change and Biodiversity are significant challenges that will take sustained effort and need all of us to play our part. The Parish Council can help by providing information and helping people to make informed choices.

19. Raise public awareness and understanding of climate and biodiversity issues, including through the village website and newsletters. Provide information to help people make informed choices. Promote practical ways in which we can all reduce our carbon footprint and support wildlife. Invite feedback, make everyone part of the discussion.
20. Celebrate our wildlife and our achievements: provide a place where people can send in and discuss wildlife photos/sightings.

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