

# Healthy for Bees: Healthy for People

Managing the grounds of public buildings for pollinators



# Introduction

As a public authority, your organisation now has a legal duty to safeguard and improve the natural environment. This guide explains one way your organisation can work towards that goal and also deliver health and well-being benefits to your staff, clients, and service-users.

Traditionally the land around public buildings has been seen as a drain on resources, but increasingly these green spaces are being recognised as an asset which can help keep staff more healthy and productive, and improve the experience of visitors.

Bees, butterflies, and brightly-coloured hover-flies are some of our most iconic and well-loved creatures, adding life and movement to our countryside and gardens. But they are also vital to many of the plants we rely on, from trees to food crops. However, these and other pollinators, have suffered catastrophic declines. For example, honeybees suffered a 23% population decline in Wales between 1985 and 2005. Changes in farming practices have reduced the habitat of most pollinators in the countryside, but we can help by recreating and restoring the conditions pollinators need to thrive in parks, gardens, and other green spaces such as the land around our buildings.

**Section 6 of The Environment (Wales) Act places a duty on every public authority to maintain and enhance biodiversity, to prepare a plan to say how it will do that, and to report on what it has done.**

**The Welsh Government's Action Plan for Pollinators in Wales requires that “Pollinators are recognised and managed for within policies and programmes within Welsh Government and across public, private and the third sector”.**

**The Well-being of Future Generations Act requires all public bodies to work towards the goal of “A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change”.**



# Making the most of our public land

The grounds of hospitals, schools, offices, and health centres are a great place to make visible improvements but don't forget the less obvious land around your depots and workshops which can offer the same opportunities for pollinators.

Of course, safety and security will always be your primary concerns, but improving conditions for pollinators will usually be completely compatible with these objectives.

If your site already has a wildlife or biodiversity management plan you should continue to follow it, and you must discuss any suggestions for changes with your organisation's advisors before starting work. Sites in the countryside, or with large areas (over 2 ha) of natural vegetation like woodland, grassland, wetland, or heath, may require very different management. If you are lucky enough to have grounds like this then seek our advice, or that of other experts such as your local Wildlife Trust. If your land contains a Site of Special Scientific Interest then you must consult Natural Resources Wales before making any changes to the way it is managed.

## Key Principles



- **Manage your grounds to delight both people and nature**
- **Provide for both adult pollinators (like butterflies) and their larvae (like caterpillars) as they will have different needs which are equally important**
- **Allow pollinators to complete their life cycles by adjusting the time of mowing and cutting**
- **Reduce or remove pesticides and fertilisers – it will save money, time, and pollinators**
- **Involve those who use your site in its planning and management**



## Grass and lawns

Aim to provide long grass that caterpillars can eat and shelter in, and flowers that adult pollinators can feed from.

If appearance is important, try mowing a one metre-wide strip around the edge of wildlife meadows to emphasise that the area is a managed feature and not just neglected.

Try new ideas on small areas first to see what works, and to build support from site users. Adjust timings and techniques to suit your area - plants flower earlier in the south and at lower altitudes, and choose plants that will thrive in your local soil type.

Be careful not to lose what you already have. Wait until the autumn before making changes to lawns and look for small, brightly-coloured Wax Cap mushrooms. If you see any, consider keeping that area of grass under your current mowing regime because these fungi are both rare and beautiful.

To allow butterflies to complete their life cycle, find an area of grass that's out of the public eye, divide it in half and cut the halves in alternate years so there is always a safe refuge for caterpillars.

# Trees

Mature trees are really valuable for pollinators and other wildlife, so take good care of what you have. Seek advice from a qualified arborist and manage your trees in the right way at the right time of year.

Plant new trees where appropriate – use the principle of putting the right tree in the right place.

Be bold and choose large tree species where possible. These will usually provide the greatest benefit for the money invested in planting and aftercare.

Plant flowering species known to attract pollinating insects – if they also provide fruit, so much the better because this provides healthy snacks for both people and wildlife.

**Plant deciduous trees to create shade in the summer where it is most needed – this will make buildings more comfortable, and save money on air-conditioning.**

**If your organisation provides care, or a resource for clients or service-users, then consider working with voluntary groups to raise money for trees and tree care. Families and friends will often want to plant a tree in thanks for the care of a loved one.**

**In woodland areas, encourage a layer of shrubs to develop beneath the trees.**

**Ensure woodlands don't end abruptly. Aim for a fringe of shrubs tapering from ground level to the height of the first tree branches. This will provide habitat for pollinators and makes the woodland look more welcoming.**





## Hedges

Make the most of any existing hedges and shrubs through sensitive trimming at the appropriate time of year – normally in the winter before the leaves have emerged.

Consider planting new hedges along fence-lines, they improve appearances and support pollinators. Ensure there is enough room between the hedge and the fence to allow for growth and access for maintenance.

When renewing or repairing hedges, increase the number of flowering shrubs such as hawthorn, spindle, and wayfaring tree.

Manage hedge-banks for wild flowers such as primrose, bluebell, wood anemone, and lords and ladies by cutting them once a year in late autumn.

Consider working with voluntary groups to reintroduce traditional hedge laying. This will add interest to the site and can be used as part of a ‘Green Gym’ programme to promote healthy exercise for clients, service-users, and staff.

## Flower-beds and planters

Select flowers that will give people pleasure and feed pollinators.

Aim to work with clients, service-users, and staff to manage flower displays. Again, this can be used as part of a ‘Green Gym’ programme to promote healthy exercise.

Establish deciduous creepers on trellis, railings, and pergolas to provide shaded areas in summer.

When planting new shrubs and perennials, pick those with single (not double) flowers and aim for species which are related to wild plants from the UK because these will support more pollinators.

Provide nutritious snacks for people and wildlife by including fruiting shrubs in beds and other displays.

Help wild bees nest by creating sandy, south-facing banks and installing “bee hotels” as part of ornamental features.

# Provide for people and inspire them

If people are inspired by the way you manage your site they are more likely to try to help pollinators themselves.

- Create paths through meadows and woodland - where safety and security considerations allow
- Keep paths clear of vegetation and ensure there are good sight-lines to reassure users.
- If possible, place benches in both sheltered and sunny areas where staff, clients/service-users and visitors can sit to relax or even hold outdoor meetings.
- Provide places for people to rest and enjoy their surroundings. Families and friends of clients or service-users will often want to donate a bench in thanks for the care of a loved one. Alternatively, voluntary groups may be able to help with raising money for new benches and their upkeep.
- Use signs to explain what you are doing and why. A mix of permanent and temporary information boards will be the best way to let people know what they can expect to see at different times of year.
- Use newsletters, notice-boards and social media to reach people and encourage them to visit the areas which are looking particularly good.
- Engage with staff associations and any client or service-user groups to encourage them to get involved, or just to enjoy the grounds and the pollinators you have worked so hard to care for.



## Practice sustainable management

Reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides and artificial fertilisers wherever possible. This will allow pollinator-friendly grassland and woodland plants to flourish, and saves money. To feed flower beds use compost made on site or obtained from local composting schemes.

Compost all green waste on site or work with the local authority and local voluntary groups to take advantage of local composting schemes. This saves the costs of landfill and bought-in compost.

Where possible, use woody waste from trees, shrubs and hedges as “habitat piles”. This saves money on disposal costs and creates shelter for wildlife.

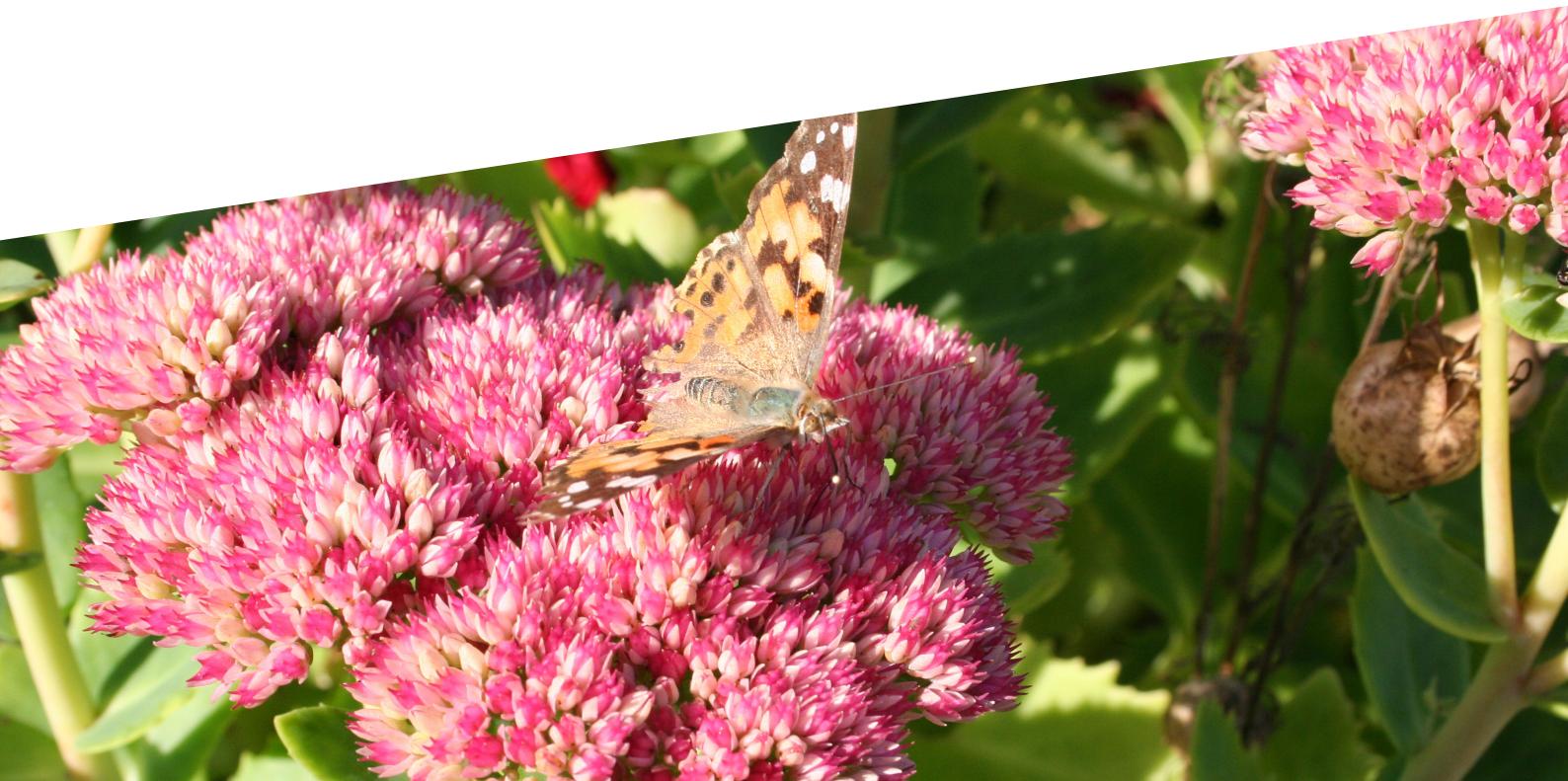
Connect your site to other green spaces if you can. This creates more opportunities for nature.

## Create green Infrastructure

Managing for pollinators is a positive step towards transforming your estate into ‘green infrastructure’ not only promoting wildlife and giving pleasure to its human visitors but contributing towards wider environmental benefits like controlling excessive summer temperatures, absorbing storm water, and trapping air pollution.

## Multiple benefits - minimal costs

Adopting this guidance will help you meet your legal duties, improve the well-being of the people who use your sites, and project a positive and environmentally-responsible image of your organisation. Evidence shows that staff productivity is enhanced when working in a green and well-managed environment, and let’s not forget the critical role pollinators play in the natural world. Of course managing your land sustainably can also reduce costs, so can we afford not to manage our grounds for pollinators?



# Find out more

## The Action Plan for Pollinators in Wales

<http://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/consmanagement/conservationbiodiversity/action-plan-for-pollinators/?lang=enUK>

## Wildlife Gardening Forum

<http://www.wlgf.org/>

## Buglife

<https://www.buglife.org.uk>

## The Wildlife Trusts Wales

<http://www.wtwales.org/>

## Royal Horticultural Society

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice>

Readers in South-east Wales can find much more detailed management advice in: Green Infrastructure Action Plan for Pollinators In South-east Wales (Chapters 5 and 6: Action Plan and Case Studies). 2015. TACP. Cardiff. (tel: 02920 228966, admin@tACP.co.uk)

Your local authority may have an urban habitat, or urban green space action plan (such as this one from Conwy County Borough Council <http://www.conwy.gov.uk/upload/public/attachments/47/urbangreenv2.pdf> )

