



Planning for Somerset's Wildlife: advice to local residents

If you have a real concern about the effects of a planning application upon local wildlife, why not get involved?

There are several elements you need to research and include in your letter to the local authority.

The Local Plan: All planning cases have to be decided by the local planning authority in line with their Local Development Plan unless material considerations suggest otherwise. The Local Plan will have policies for the protection and enhancement of the natural world, so make sure you quote these to support your case. Copies of your planning authority's Local Plan can be found in libraries and on-line. It is worth noting Local Plans are due to be replaced by Local Development Frameworks, of which the Core Strategy will be the main document, in 2011 – just like the Local Plan, the Core Strategy will contain policies for the conservation and enhancement of the natural world.

Material Considerations: The conservation of biodiversity is a material consideration according to Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 9, and Government Circular 06/05.

"Biodiversity" includes these elements:

- Species and habitats listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and Local BAPs
- Legally protected plant and animal species
- Linear and continuous habitat features that are of major importance to flora and fauna, enabling dispersal, migration and breeding. These features include hedgerows, rivers and their banks, small woodlands, and ponds.

Lists and detailed ecological information about the species and habitats included on the UK BAP can be found at <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/>

You can find information about the county BAP "Wild Somerset", as well as the various habitat and species action plans for each of Somerset's local authorities, on the Somerset Biodiversity Partnership pages of the County Council website: <http://www.somerset.gov.uk>

If you think any of these features will be affected by the development, you should clearly state your concerns to the planning officer, quoting Planning Policy Statement 9, Government Circular 06/05, and remind them of their duty toward the protection and enhancement of biodiversity under the NERC Act 2006.

Biodiversity Duty: According to section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, the planning authority must have regard to the conservation (this means protection and enhancement) of biodiversity when determining a planning application. The Wildlife Trusts have produced guidance on complying with the NERC Act, which can be found at: <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/index.php?section=about:publications:free> Remind the planning officer of this duty in your letter.

Ecological information: If the applicant has not submitted a wildlife survey you should raise this issue with the planning officer. The planning officer needs to know what wildlife is out there to be able to comply with wildlife conservation policies and legislation. In most cases, without ecological survey information, a sound planning decision cannot be reached. It is the responsibility of the

applicant to provide this information, and you should ask the planning officer to request relevant surveys before a decision is made.

If a survey has been undertaken, check that...

- ...its scope was informed by a “desktop survey”, which is essentially a search of all species records held by the Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC). If SERC hold recent records of bats on the site, for instance, it would be prudent of the surveyor to undertake a bat survey.
- ...it undertaken at the right time of year for the type of habitat and species it assessed.
- ...it was undertaken by a qualified and experienced ecologist or biologist (usually you would expect the surveyor to be a member of a professional, accredited body such as the IEEM)
- ...it has identified species and habitats that you know are there
- ...it has made recommendations on how the development can minimise harm, and mitigate against any unavoidable impacts to habitats and species

Check all of these things, and if you think anything is amiss, point it out to the planning officer in your letter. Remember, a survey is just a snapshot in time: if the habitat and conditions are right, a species could still use the site, even if it wasn't recorded on the few days over which surveys took place!

Get support: If other local residents share your concerns, encourage them to write their own letter to the planning officer. The more voices, the stronger the message.

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Want to get more involved? Why not consider becoming a Planning Volunteer with Somerset Wildlife Trust? For more details contact the Planning and Advocacy Co-ordinator on 01823 652437 or email michelle.osbourn@somersetwildlife.org

Somerset Wildlife Trust is the county's leading conservation and environmental charity, with over 20,500 members. Our vision is for a *Living Landscape* in Somerset, a natural environment rich in wildlife, sustained and cared for by all. To this end we are working with our partners, members, landowners, and volunteers to protect, restore, recreate and reconnect valuable wildlife habitat across town and co