

## 4. LANDSCAPE AND NATURE CONSERVATION

- 4.1 This guideline provides further guidance on the conservation aspect of landscaping, supplementing the Policies in the Environment Section of Part 3 of the Plan, particularly Policy 96. Conservation and enhancement of natural habitats helps to create a more attractive and varied environment and is fundamental in maintaining biodiversity and ecological processes. Nature conservation provides many benefits for the local population.
- 4.2 The main human benefits derived from the presence of 'greenspace' and the associated flora and fauna include:
- psychological benefits (pleasure and sense of well-being, reduction of stress);
  - community benefits (focus for meeting and activities);
  - educational benefits (a setting for children and adults to learn about many aspects of the world around them); and
  - health benefits (possible reduction in air and water borne pollution, alleviation of impact of noisy and other unsocial land uses).
- 4.3 The chief benefits are of course for the wildlife itself for which the provision and retention of habitats is fundamental.

### Strategy

- 4.4 Dacorum Nature Conservation Strategy – a local Biodiversity Action Plan – provides the vision, objectives, framework, targets and action plans for the conservation of the Borough's biodiversity. It sets the following priorities:
- For habitats
    - Beech woods
    - Chalk rivers
    - Chalk grasslands
    - Heaths and acid grasslands
    - Unimproved neutral grasslands
    - Ancient hedgerows
    - Open spaces in towns and villages
  - For species
    - Common Dormouse
    - Pipistrelle Bat
    - Brown Hare
    - Water Vole
    - Natterer's Bat
    - Grey Partridge

Skylark	Song Thrush
Linnets	Bullfinch
Corn Bunting	Reed Bunting
Spotted Flycatcher	Tree Sparrow
Barn Owl	Turtle Dove
Great Crested Newt	White-clawed Crayfish
Violet Click Beetle	Grizzled Skipper
Duke of Burgundy	Chalkhill Blue
Fritillary	Stream Water-crowfoot
Pasqueflower	Chiltern Gentian
Ivy-leaved Water- Crowfoot	Narrow-lipped
White Helleborine	Helleborine
Yellow Bird's-nest	Black Poplar

- 4.5 It identifies areas meriting conservation action: i.e.

Ashridge – Berkhamsted Common  
 Aldbury – Pitstone  
 Tring Reservoirs and Grand Union Canal  
 Long Marston  
 Tring Park  
 Tring – Wigginton Plateau  
 Chess Valley Upper Slopes  
 Upper Gade Valley  
 Upper River Gade

- 4.6 The strategy identifies Wildlife Sites, local wildspaces and other sites with potential and suggests approaches to nature conservation for developers, public bodies and individuals.
- 4.7 It will more sharply focus conservation action and may in due course require elaboration of these guidelines.

### **Green Network in Towns and Large Villages**

- 4.8 The Council's Open Land Strategy identifies major open areas in the towns and large villages. Features such as green wedges (e.g. Shrubhill Common), green chains (e.g. the Nicky Line) and route corridors (e.g. the Grand Union Canal) provide the opportunity for wildlife to migrate safely between town and country, and to spread within settlements, as well as bringing 'greenspace' close to people's homes, providing buffers between different parts of settlements and generally enhancing the quality of life.

### **Assessment of Nature Conservation Value**

- 4.9 The Nature Conservation Strategy provides an assessment of the nature conservation value of the main sites and further site - specific advice from appropriate bodies such as the Hertfordshire Biological

Records Centre, English Nature or the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust will be sought as necessary.

- 4.10 There is a presumption in the Plan against development which would adversely affect Sites of Special Scientific Interest and nature reserves (shown on the Proposals Map) and other sites of biological, geological or physiographical importance (defined by reference to the above bodies). It is particularly important to assess whether protected species are present on the development site.

### **General Building Development**

- 4.11 A positive approach should be adopted to development in order to conserve or improve nature conservation interest. Even in circumstances where damage is unavoidable because of the pressure of other needs, the aim should be to limit that damage, and to create opportunities to redress it. It should be borne in mind that, if development is proposed adjoining a site of nature conservation interest, a buffer zone should be retained, as the area immediately surrounding such a site will also be valuable in supporting wildlife species, and providing part of their food supply. Reference is made in the guideline on Landscaping on Development Sites to the use of native species and the desirability of taking account of the needs of wildlife.
- 4.12 Retention of natural features, particularly ponds, trees, shrubs and hedgerows, where these can be blended in with the development, is vital for nature conservation, and building work should minimise disturbance, e.g. at nesting times.
- 4.13 New landscaping should be in the form of group planting of native trees and shrubs rather than isolated trees. Hedges are preferred to fencing, and for example berry-bearing plants could be included to attract birds and nest boxes provided in appropriate locations. New ponds or wetland features could be created, perhaps as a more imaginative response to the needs of surface water drainage. Conservation of existing orchards or the planting of small new orchards – formerly a common feature of urban development – should be considered where possible. Encouragement of certain species can lead to 'natural control' of garden pests.
- 4.14 The layout of the built elements of a scheme should avoid disruption of any wildlife linkages or corridors to adjoining sites, and planting should create continuity of species.
- 4.15 The above points apply to industrial/business developments as well as housing. Good landscaping can enhance a development for relatively little cost, giving an attractive "green" image and a pleasant setting for employees to relax in.

## **New Roads**

- 4.16 Although new roads are disruptive to wildlife, with careful design their impact can be minimised. Where they cross important wildlife corridors, animal tunnels could be provided. These do not need to be sophisticated or expensive. New planting should add to the wildlife value of the area and reflect native species. Planting helps to screen the road from adjoining uses, and in urban areas fast growing willow screens could be experimented with. Cutting sides and embankments can be visually harsh and fast growing species should be employed to give ground cover and conceal the scars of construction. Planting also increases soil stability and reduces water run-off. Other measures to reduce or attenuate run-off include grass swales or French drains by the roadside and use of permeable surfaces. Verges can provide valuable linear habitats and corridors. The centre of dual carriageways and roundabouts also provide scope for planting. Wildflower seed mixes can be sown beside rural sections of road, but even in urban areas planting of greater nature conservation value can enhance and add interest to the town. Wildflower seeds should preferably be gathered from the locality where they are to be planted, and the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and the Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre should be consulted. Environmentally sensitive maintenance regimes should be followed. Where traffic calming measures are introduced, there is an opportunity for creating a softer landscape rather than inserting concrete tubs of flowers or bollards in the areas freed from traffic.

## **New Playing Fields and Space**

- 4.17 Although playing fields and informal recreation areas require short mown grass and a good surface for ball games, there is still scope to improve their nature conservation value. Spare land not required for pitches can be planted with wild flower seeds, native shrubs and trees, and mown less frequently. Site boundaries could be similarly treated, and windbreaks created. Amenity land provided in large housing sites should also provide a variety of habitats.
- 4.18 New school playing fields could allocate 'nature areas' so that school children may be involved in the creation and maintenance of habitats: the observation of wildlife will promote an appreciation of and respect for the environment.

## **Countryside Development**

- 4.19 Although traditional farming has created the landscapes and ecology we generally value today, post-war developments in agriculture (particularly greater efficiency through intensification, greater mechanisation and economies of scale) have had a substantial impact on the appearance and character of the countryside. Farmers are being encouraged to diversify and find alternative uses for land.

Whether the major land use remains agricultural or becomes an alternative such as a country park or golf course, it is very important that the change is:

- controlled to protect fragile habitats and populations of locally important species; and
- managed in the future to retain and enhance local landscape and ecological distinctiveness.

4.20 New outdoor land uses can help to create or recreate habitats in appropriate locations.

4.21 New building in the countryside is unlikely to be on a large scale, but it is even more important that appropriate species are used in such settings.

### **Improved Management for Nature Conservation**

4.22 Many of the practices suggested for new sites could be introduced on existing sites and thus improve their value for nature conservation. For example, roadside verges, particularly in rural areas, could have their wildlife interest heightened by a simple maintenance regime. A single swathe cut in early summer for visibility, then a complete cut to the hedge line in the late Summer would allow a full spectrum of wild flowers to flourish, as well as their associated fauna. Other bodies such as Network Rail and British Waterways could be encouraged to adopt more environmentally sensitive maintenance regimes for the important linear habitats and wildlife corridors they manage.

4.23 It is also possible to create new habitats on industrial sites as demonstrated by the scheme at Shell's Buncefield Terminal in Hemel Hempstead. This included the creation of a large pond, planting of trees, and sowing areas with a wild flower seed mix. Groundwork Hertfordshire operates a 'Bright Sites' campaign to enhance industrial areas, and they and the Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service will advise and assist Parish Councils and local community groups in enhancing their immediate environment.