# **The Wildlife Trusts logo - The Land TrustAction for Insects:**

# **A simple guide for local authorities**

Insects are a key component of healthy ecosystems but 41% of species are at risk of extinction. Action for Insects is a campaign led by the Wildlife Trusts and supported by a range of partners who are determined to reverse the alarming declines in insects and help nature recover across the UK.

We must all take action by reducing the use of harmful chemicals where we live, work and farm. We also need to start establishing a Nature Recovery Network by creating insect-friendly habitats in our gardens, towns, cities and countryside that are bigger, better protected and more joined up.

Local councils can play a key role in helping insects thrive. When we take action to help insects, we help all sorts of wildlife: from plants and fungi to birds, bats, reptiles, fish and more.

**5 top reasons to help insects:**

* We have to create a Nature Recovery Network – and the new Environment Act will make it mandatory.
* Counties needs pollinators – to support their farmers and their woodlands and grasslands.
* Helping nature has multiple benefits for the community: from locking up carbon to reducing flooding.
* You can see results fast: insects reproduce quickly and are easy to measure. They also feed numerous other animals including birds, bats, reptiles, amphibians and fish, so a little help goes a long way!
* People love wildlife! Show you care by helping them thrive.

Here we provide some easy, often cost-saving ways to take Action for Insects, covering a number of policy, practical and engagement related actions. **Remember:**

* These steps can be taken in any order.
* Don’t be put off by the size of the task - doing something is better than doing nothing!
* Contact your local Wildlife Trust to talk through your plans. Not only can we provide help and advice; we can also help promote the actions you are taking to build public awareness and support.

For further information please refer to the Wildlife Trusts’ reports on the causes of insect declines[[1]](#footnote-1) and how we can reverse these trends[[2]](#footnote-2), plus action guides for individuals[[3]](#footnote-3), communities[[4]](#footnote-4) and schools[[5]](#footnote-5).

# **Make a pledge:** Make a public commitment to help insects and other wildlife thrive

A public commitment, whether on insects specifically or wildlife as a whole, will show the public that you understand the issue and that you care. It also helps build support for changes you make, such as changes to land management practices, and encourages the community to take their own actions too. So, state your intentions loud and proud on your website, and share them in your newsletter too.

Your commitment should:

* Cover both pesticide reduction and habitat creation.
* Be specific – what will you do, by when, and how will you check whether it has been successful?

**Resources:**

* Suggested motion text:

[Name of Authority or Council] acknowledges that insect populations are in serious decline locally and across the UK, and that everyone has a part to play to help them recover. We all depend on insects for a healthy and functioning natural world. Therefore [Name of Authority or Council] pledges to take action to help reverse this trend, and will work with communities, organisations and land managers to better understand how our activities can affect insects. We will reduce the routine and unnecessary use of pesticides across [Name of Authority or Council]’s estate and will support the creation and restoration of habitats in order to ensure pollinators and other beneficial insects can thrive. We encourage all parts of society to do the same.

# **Get informed:** Seek advice, train your staff - fill your ranks with experts

Your staff are amazing assets. By actively training them to understand the importance of supporting insects, you will give all departments the opportunity to play their part.

You can empower your staff to make a difference by:

* Identifying key roles and responsibilities
* Identifying your experts, sharing knowledge and filling knowledge gaps.
* Designating insect champions.
* Encouraging staff to raise opportunities for insect recovery

Further support is available. You can enlist conservation experts, e.g. from your local Wildlife Trust or natural history society, to provide advice and expertise. Why not consider partnership opportunities to better embed experts in the organisation? For example, some councils have seconded a member of Wildlife Trust stuff to work right in their midst, supporting them from within to make their council true wildlife champions.

**Resources:**

* Contact your local Wildlife Trust for advice. They may also be able to offer personalised training for your staff.

# **Go formal:** Embed insect recovery in policies, strategies and plans

Councils already have a range of environmental obligations through such legislation as the Natural Environment & Rural Communities (NERC) Act, the Wildlife & Countryside Act and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The upcoming Environment Bill is expected to confer additional responsibilities including the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies to contribute to a national Nature Recovery Network.

In addition, many councils have pledged to reach net zero carbon emissions in the coming years. While this will require actions to reduce emissions, the growth of nature can play a vital part by locking up carbon, simultaneously limiting climate change and offering multiple benefits to the community from practical ones like water management to wellbeing impacts such as access to high quality greenspace.

Action For Insects is supporting councils to address many of their existing and upcoming legal requirements. By taking action for insects, you will be:

* Contributing to building an abundance and diversity of wildlife.
* Limiting climate change by keeping carbon locked up.
* Supporting communities’ mental and physical wellbeing.
* Reducing losses to businesses and the public by reducing drought and flooding.

Insect recovery should be embedded in ALL relevant policies, strategies and action plans, including but not limited to biodiversity and climate change strategies, pollinator action plans, land management plans and local plans (addressing local development). Policies should include both a target for pesticide reduction and a target for insect-friendly habitat creation, restoration and protection. Where available, existing strategies can be updated to ensure they address insects.

A good rule of thumb is that all policies, no matter their topic, should be assessed to ensure that they will not have adverse impacts on the area’s natural resources.

**Resources:**

* The Pesticide Action Network’s call for a UK pesticide reduction target <https://www.pan-uk.org/pesticide-reduction-target/>
* Buglife’s Local Authority Guidance on how to help insects through policy <https://www.buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines/b-lines-guidance/local-authority-guidance/>
* Friends of the Earth’s guidance on developing a pollinator action plan <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/bees/developing-pollinator-action-plan>
* UK Government’s National Pollinator Strategy <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-pollinator-strategy-2014-to-2024-implementation-plan>
* Biodiversity Wales’ Bee Friendly Action Guide <https://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/File/264/en-GB>
* Bumblebee Conservation’s Local Authorities pack <https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/images/uploads/Local_authorities_pack_full.pdf>
* Examples of local pollinator strategies from West Sussex County Council <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/policies-and-reports/environment-planning-and-waste-policy-and-reports/pollinator-action-plan/> and Cornwall <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/grow-nature/about/pollinator-action-plan/>
* Buglife’s Important Invertebrate Areas <https://www.buglife.org.uk/our-work/important-invertebrate-areas/>

# **Go wild:** Designate some areas to leave wild and just let things grow!

This is a low-cost, low effort way to support biodiversity. Simply leave some areas to grow wild and let nature do the work!

Try leaving wild patches in various areas: parks, gardens, verges, allotments, industrial estates, hedgerows and flower pots – then sit back and see what grows. Adding a simple sign makes clear to passers-by that this is being done intentionally, which increases public support. What’s more, seeing what grows naturally is a great way of discovering what species might thrive under a less intensive management regime, giving you options to expend the wild area and cut back on maintenance costs on a bigger scale. These wild areas can even become a project for local children to spot what new species make the patch their home.

The Covid-19 pandemic has heightened many people’s need to connect with nature, as well as providing an excellent impetus for changing management regimes. Several councils have made changes with positive results.

**Resources:**

* All Ireland Pollinator Plan guidance for councils <https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Pollinator-Council-Guide-FINAL.pdf>
* Council approaches to responding to Covid-19 in Plymouth <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/newsroom/plymouthnews/werelettingthingsgowildflowersandinsects>

# **Join things up:** Create wildlife corridors by managing road verges for nature

Across the UK there are around 300,000 miles of road verge, totalling an area of over 200,000ha – about 10% of the entire size of Wales. They are home to almost half of the UK’s wildflower species (that’s 720 different flowers), which in turn support hundreds of species of pollinators, from beetles to bumblebees. So, if managed for wildlife while keeping road safety in mind, road verges can become a key part of a national Nature Recovery Network, connecting town and countryside, and joining up vital places for wildlife.

Small changes make a big contribution to putting nature on the road to recovery. While some road verges – particularly at junctions, certain bends or on busy roads – need to be cut for driver and pedestrian safety, many can simply be left to grow ​for longer and ​cut later in summer when insects have benefitted from the nectar and pollen. ​Where possible cuttings should be removed for hay or compost and some councils have trialled this successfully. ​Verges can also support important small mammal, bird and reptile populations so management plans should cater for these too where appropriate. Your local Wildlife Trust can give advice; we work with highways authorities, councils and landowners to advise and help manage road verges.

**Resources:**

* Plantlife’s guide to managing verges for wildflowers and pollinators <https://plantlife.love-wildflowers.org.uk/roadvergecampaign/management-guidelines>
* Buglife guidance on managing road verges for pollinators <https://cdn.buglife.org.uk/2019/10/Roberts-Phillips-Managing-road-verges-for-pollinators-report-040119.pdf>
* The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan guidance for transport corridors <https://pollinators.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Transport-Corridors_actions-to-help-pollinators-2019-WEB.pdf>
* [Road verge symposium presentations & workshop notes](https://butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/conservation-projects/building-sites-for-butterflies/road-verge-symposium-presentations)
* The cost savings achieved by Dorset County Council by changing their management regimes <https://butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/Giles%20Nicholson%20Dorset%20Council%20-%20Persuading%20decison%20makers%20to%20manage%20verges%20for%20ecology.pdf>

# **Cut the chemicals:** Stop all routine use of pesticides on public land

Many pesticides are commonly applied, often several times a year and through broad, often-non-specific, application methods which has resulted in a dangerous accumulation of chemicals in our soils, waterways and coastal waters. But these chemicals do not just harm the organisms that they are designed to control. They can also have a major impact on non-target organisms and can even affect human health. For example, in 2015 the World Health Organisation published its findings that glyphosate is a “probable human carcinogen”[[6]](#footnote-6).

A significant reduction in pesticide-related harms across the UK is required to reverse insect declines, improve human health, and secure a wilder future. Failure to act could risk not just our food security, but widespread ecological collapse.

Replacing existing pesticides with less hazardous versions is necessary but sadly not sufficient. Many pesticides that are initially considered relatively harmless to the wider environment are later found to be far more damaging than anticipated.

Cutting out pesticide use can be challenging, but not impossible. Many councils have driven significant reductions in use and even gone pesticide free in some areas. Why not try these approaches:

* Conduct an audit of what you currently use.
* Commit to only using pesticide as a last resort, rather than a standard, across the whole estate.
* Use green flag award criteria to drive down pesticide use while promoting your green spaces.
* Trial a pesticide-free approach on a specified area.
* Set an ambitious target and phase out pesticide use over 3 years.

**Resources:**

* Pesticide Action Network’s guide for councils <https://www.pan-uk.org/information-for-local-authorities/>
* European Citizen’s initiative to ban glyphosate http://www.banglyphosate.eu/
* Pesticide Action Network’s case studies of UK pesticide free towns <https://www.pan-uk.org/pesticide-free-towns-success-stories/>
* A summary of less damaging alternatives to pesticides <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/Integrated%20Weed%20Control%20Programme%20Scotland%20v4%20PDF.pdf>
* Cornwall Council’s advice on chemical alternatives <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/grow-nature/about/alternatives-to-pesticides/>
* The Green Flag Award Scheme <http://www.greenflagaward.org.uk/>

# **Make space:** Create and restore insect-friendly habitat

Wildlife can make a home in a huge variety of spaces, so with a little thought your borough could be blooming with wildlife in no time. Where do you already have greenspaces that could be better supported, and which urban areas have space for wildlife? Where do you have buffering sites that could be expanded? From flowerbeds and window-boxes to parks and allotments; every little helps, so don’t forget the little corners, but why not also look at larger areas? This is also a great opportunity to improve areas suffering from social deprivation. Can you get the community involved, encourage them to volunteer and help you create more space for nature?

Wildlife can be incorporated into many aspects of town infrastructure, such as green walls and rooves, and flower beds in road calming measures. Planting fruit trees in urban green spaces provides food for both pollinators and people. Meanwhile, costs can be reduced by opting for native perennial plants rather than annual bedding plants. This will also help to support native insect species.

The upcoming Environment Bill will introduce a requirement for development to lead to improvements in biodiversity. Councils can show leadership by driving the creation of a Nature Recovery Network on their estate and across the area.

**Resources:**

* Buglife guidance for creating B-lines <https://www.buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines/b-lines-guidance/>
* The Wildlife Trusts’ Action for Insects community guide <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/your-guide-taking-action-insects-your-community>

# **Spread the word:** Promote public awareness and engagement

To create a Wilder Future, all parts of society have a role to play. Public awareness-raising activities are key to the success of reducing or ending pesticideuse. By telling people what you’re up to and why, it builds public support for the changes you are making as well as encouraging others to take part. 43,000 volunteers are already active with their Wildlife Trust, making their own contribution to the area in which they live. We have had close to 20,000 people sign up to our Action for Insects campaign, demonstrating how important it is to people.

Working with young people, through youth councils, youth groups and schools is an excellent opportunity to embed insect-friendly policies for the future and to engage a willing workforce to drive local action on the ground. We have recently launched a new set of school resources aimed at inspiring and engaging students to learn more about insects, the troubles they’re facing, and how action can be taken in schools to help them. There are also monitoring schemes available that help to show the impact that action are having. There are many existing citizen science schemes that can monitor various types of insect. Check out our Action for Insects school guide.

You can spread the word by:

* Telling the public what you’re up to with signage, newsletters etc.
* Encouraging the public to sign up to our campaign and receive their own free, downloadable action guides <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/take-action-insects>
* Encourage Schools and educators to download our Action for Insects School guide <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/take-action-insects-your-school>
* Promoting citizen science projects to help people learn about insects and collect valuable insect population data.

**Resources:**

The Wildlife Trusts’ action guides for individuals and community <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/Action%20for%20Insects%20-%20Guide.pdf>, communities <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/your-guide-taking-action-insects-your-community> and schools <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/take-action-insects-your-school>

The Wildlife Trusts’ guide for taking action every day https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions

* Pesticide Action Network’s pesticide free challenge for kids <https://www.pan-uk.org/pesticide-free-challenge-for-kids/>
* Bug’s Matter survey <https://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/bugs-matter>
* Flower-insect timed counts project <https://www.ceh.ac.uk/our-science/projects/pollinator-monitoring>
* The Big Butterfly Count <https://bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org/>
* The Great Stag Hunt https://ptes.org/get-involved/surveys/garden/great-stag-hunt/stag-hunt-survey/

# **Help others:** Support other land managers to take action too

Just as councils can make a significant difference to insects by taking action on their own estate, they can amplify their impact by supporting other land managers to take action too. The Ministry of Defence is a classic example of a land manager that offers considerable benefits to wildlife, and universities, shopping centres, hospitals, local businesses and transport operators can all play a valuable role, as well as the National Trust and English Heritage. In each case, action should include reducing pesticide use and increasing insect-friendly habitat.

Councils may be able to help by:

* Incentivising target setting.
* Running a pesticide amnesty to help landowners dispose of illegal or unwanted chemicals.
* Supporting tenant farmers to adopt Integrated Pest Management.
* Promoting what local landowners are doing.

Why not draw together a stakeholder group of land managers to discuss what action they could take and what support they would need?

**Resources:**

* All Ireland Pollinator Plan guidance for engaging with different groups <https://pollinators.ie/>
* Medway Valley Countryside Partnership’s Pesticide Amnesty project <https://medwayvalley.org/our-projects/>
* The Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group <https://www.fwag.org.uk/about-fwag>
* The Nature Friendly Farming Network <https://www.nffn.org.uk/>

## **Councils can play an important role in helping insects thrive.**

## **Any questions? Contact your local Wildlife Trust today!**

1. <https://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-04/Kent%20Wildlife%20Trust%20-%20Insect%20Decline.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/action-for-insects07/Reversing%20the%20Decline%20of%20Insects%20Report.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/your-guide-taking-action-insects-home> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/your-guide-taking-action-insects-your-community [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/take-action-insects-your-school> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <http://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/iarcnews/pdf/MonographVolume112.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)