



# Churchdown Parish Council

## Biodiversity Policy 2024



*Image courtesy of Bing Images 23.11.2023*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 there is a duty on public authorities in England, including Parish Councils, to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of their policy or decision making.<sup>1</sup> ( DEFRA , 2023 ) This was further strengthened by the Environment Act 2021 so public authorities must now consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. This means a public authority must :

- Consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on their consideration
- Act to deliver policies and achieve objectives

Biodiversity refers to the variety of life on earth<sup>1</sup>. Biodiversity is everywhere: in gardens, fields, hedgerows, mountains, ponds, rivers/streams and the sea.

The *IPBES Report*<sup>2</sup> has assessed changes in biodiversity over the past five decades and demonstrates that rates of extinction are accelerating hundreds of times faster than usual.

## 2. CHURCHDOWN – THE LOCAL AREA



*Gloucestershire Live ,24.11. 2023.*

Churchdown is a semi – rural village, surrounded by open countryside on 3 sides : it is nestled at the foot of Chosen Hill , 511 feet above sea level at its' highest point. Churchdown takes its' name from the Celtic word Cruc, and Saxon word 'Dun', meaning hill.



*Tinkers Wood – Chosen Hill : Image Courtesy of Hucclecote Parish Council 9.5.2022*

Woodland walks circle the hill, and a reservoir provides water to Churchdown and Gloucester.

<sup>1</sup> As defined in 'Biodiversity 2020: a strategy of England's wildlife and ecosystems'

<sup>2</sup> The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services 2019

**Green space** is the essence of Churchdown – it has a wealth of parks and open spaces which provide opportunities for exercise, recreation and relaxation helping to connect people with nature and each other, whilst enhancing both physical and mental wellbeing.

Having access to green spaces enhances physical health and mental wellbeing.<sup>3</sup>

Open green spaces and parks can also help mitigate against climate change and pollution.



Greenspaces and parks in urban areas are also essential for biodiversity, providing food and habitat for wildlife. They also act as corridors or ‘stepping stones’ linking areas of higher wildlife value<sup>4</sup>.

*The Churchdown and Innsworth Neighbourhood Plan* includes a clear objective to promote **connectivity** between habitats by creating wildlife corridors and protecting existing hedgerows for the enhancement of biodiversity.<sup>i</sup>

*Public Right of Way Image Courtesy of Ann Smith C&INP 2019*

This becomes increasingly important in the context of the ongoing biodiversity decline in the UK, in which 41% species are declining and 1 in 10 is threatened with extinction.

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<sup>3</sup> Citation Dobson, J., Harris, C., Eadson, W., and Gore, T. (2019). Space to thrive: A rapid evidence review of the benefits of parks and green spaces for people and communities. The National Lottery Heritage Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund, London.

<sup>4</sup> Churchdown and Innsworth Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2031 pg. 24  
<https://www.churchdownandinnsworthplan.co.uk/about-the-plan/>

### 3. CHURCHDOWN PARISH COUNCIL GREEN SPACE RESPONSIBILTIES

CPC manages a number of green spaces, as owner, trustee and partner authority.

- i. **Roadside Grass Verges and Splays** Churchdown Parish Council cuts roadside grass verges and splays on behalf of Gloucestershire County Council.
  
- ii. **Churchdown and Innsworth Burial ground** is managed by a joint Burial Ground Authority – the area contains memorial gardens and trees : responsibilities extend to adjacent woodlands situated on Chosen Hill.



*Churchdown and Innsworth Burial Ground.*  
[www.churchdown-pc.gov.uk](http://www.churchdown-pc.gov.uk). 2020

#### iii. Play Areas and Parks

- Chapel Hay (held in trust)
- Churchdown Park (rented)
- John Daniels (owned)
- Oakhurst Close (owned)
- Shamrock Close (owned)
- St. John's (held in trust)
- Tudor Mead (owned)

#### iv. Sports Pitches

John Daniels Recreation ground is home to a full sized football pitch and cricket pitch  
There is also capacity for a midi football at Churchdown Park if needed.

*John Daniels Cricket Pitch Image courtesy of  
Churchdown Cricket Club 14.5.22*



## v. Community Orchard



Local apples and pears (Moorcroft and Blakeney-Red pears) are grown in the community orchard which is open to residents

*Churchdown Park Community Orchard A. Smith  
C&INP 2019*

## vi. Allotment Gardens

CPC manages two allotment sites

- Churchdown Park ( rented from Gloucester City Council )
- Audenfield ( rented from the National Allotment Society )



*Churchdown Park Allotments Courtesy of Ann Smith C&INP 2019*

## vii. Pocket park



A small area of inviting public green space and woodland in Churchdown Park which offers habitat for various species of wildlife and opportunities for residents to connect with nature and can relax, exercise, socialise and play.

*Churchdown Park Pocket Park G. Connor 14.8.2023*

## viii Ponds

Churchdown Ponds built by CPC in 2010 , with community funding and help from serviceman at Imjiin Barracks, provide a biodiverse home for many wildlife species and plants.

*Churchdown Park Ponds Images Courtesy of A. Smith. C&INP 2019*



## viii Nature Reserve

An area of uncut grass and woodland between Churchdown Park and the A40 Cheltenham – Gloucester.

## **4. GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

### **i. Maintain and enhance existing wildlife-rich habitats**

It is important to protect and enhance areas within Churchdown that are already benefiting wildlife.

### **ii. Reduce pesticide and herbicide use**

CPC will reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides used on Churchdown Parish Council owned and /or managed land, and check use of such products by contractors.

Insects and weeds make up the vast majority of the species found across our sites, and they are food for other groups of animals such as birds. Pesticides are indiscriminate and will kill organisms other than their targets and can also accumulate in animals that eat sprayed insects. Similarly, herbicides can affect non-target species through direct accidental spraying or by drifting in the air. Biodiversity in our open spaces will benefit from minimising pesticide and herbicide use. However, in some instances (for example controlling non-native invasive species and keeping paths safe) there may be no current viable alternative. In these situations, the minimal possible amount will be safely and carefully applied.

### **iii. Remove invasive non-native plants**

Fortunately, there are limited occurrences of non-native plant species on CPC land. CPC will remove invasive and non-invasive species that are detrimental to native flora or fauna as required. ( such as Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed )

### **iv. Schedule vegetation clearance to avoid nesting birds**

CPC is responsible for managing hedgerows on land under its ownership or control. There are lengths of native hedgerows which are high value for biodiversity . These will be sensitively managed with wildlife in mind.

Breeding birds and their nests are protected by law. CPC will continue to avoid vegetation clearance and tree works during the bird breeding season from March to September. During the 'shoulders' of the season, vegetation will be checked prior to starting work because climate change is altering nesting times.

## **v. Create new habitats**

CPC will increase the amount and types of available habitat benefits wildlife and seek opportunities to create new habitats such as **wildflower meadows, orchards tree copses, native hedges, bird boxes and log piles**. Where appropriate, vegetation within existing habitats can be diversified by adding wildflowers, long grass areas, shrubs, and trees.

Allowing natural processes to occur also creates new habitats. For example, leaving leaf litter and dead vegetation wherever possible as a habitat for invertebrates: winter die back of herbaceous plants provides overwintering habitat for invertebrates, whilst leaving standing or fallen deadwood (where it does not impact public safety) provides valuable habitat for fungi and invertebrates

## **vi. Working in Partnership**

CPC's main aim is to contribute towards safeguarding and benefiting the species and habitats within Churchdown and to provide an identity and focus for nature conservation work throughout the area .

This will shape how CPC makes decisions and formulate policy in all areas of its work and externally, working cooperatively and in partnership with other organisations and the wider community of Gloucestershire , for example :

- Churchdown Trees Warden
- Gloucestershire County Council
- Tewkesbury Borough Council
- CPRE
- Environment Agency
- Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group
- Forestry Authority
- Friends of Chosen Hill
- Gloucestershire Rural Community Council
- Gloucestershire Vale Volunteers
- Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust
- Natural England
- RSPB
- The Orchard Trust
- Woodland Trust

## **a. Community Groups, Volunteers and Charities**

Churchdown Parish Council works with and supports a number of organisations who specialise in conservation work including charitable and voluntary community organisations : for example , *The Friends Of Churchdown Hill and The Woodland Trust* , who work to maintain and enhance ancient woodlands, paths, fences and information boards on Chosen Hill, whilst protecting the natural habitat for wildlife :



*Chosen Hill Walk : image courtesy of Hucclecote Parish Council 2018*



*Woodland Trust Sign : G. Connor 22.5.2023*

The Gloucestershire Vale Conservation Volunteers plant shrubs, mend fences and clear ponds in Churchdown Park which maintains and protects the natural habitat for local wildlife.

*All Images courtesy of Ann Smith 22.5.22*



G. Connor

Biodiversity Policy

28.11.2023

## **b. Local Authority Partnership Working**

CPC will work with both Gloucestershire County Council and Tewkesbury Borough Council to protect biodiversity habitats and promote nature recovery where possible.

CPC will follow relevant guidance in relation to habitat specific works such as the guidance produced by GCC and the Gloucestershire Wildlife trust guide on the management of roadside verges <sup>5</sup> ([www.gloucestershire.gov.uk](http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk) 2023).

CPC will follow habitat specific principles when clearing encroachments and weeds when assisting GCC and TBC in the clearance of footpaths and PROWS.

## **c. Planning**

CPC will consider the impact on biodiversity in the decisions made through the Parish Council, especially when commenting on planning applications. Specifically with a view to achieving net biodiversity gain through all new development.<sup>6</sup> (NPPF 2023)

CPC will specifically refer to the relevant policies in the Churchdown and Innsworth Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2031 <sup>7</sup>( C&INP 2018 ) which aim to protect our significant biodiversity assets by providing new green and blue infrastructure and new accessible green space for the growing population

## **d. Private Contractors**

CPC will seek to use grounds maintenance companies who use processes and products which aim to reconcile the tender specification with a need to protect biodiversity habitats.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/highways/plans-policies-procedures-manuals/biodiversity-and-highways/> ( 2023 )

<sup>6</sup> National Planning Policy Framework

<sup>7</sup> Churchdown and Innsworth Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2031  
<https://www.churchdownandinnsworthplan.co.uk/>

## **vii Publicity and Engagement**

CPC will look to promote biodiversity via the Parish Council website.

It is important to keep the public well informed when making changes for biodiversity in public areas, both to retain their support and as an opportunity to increase their awareness. For example, when leaving grass uncut to allow wildflowers to thrive, educational signs can help mitigate any impression of neglect. CPC will consult the public when undertaking biodiversity enhancement projects and will offer opportunities for public involvement where appropriate and resources allow.

CPC will endeavor to encourage more people into green spaces through communications (press and social media) and by working with the Friends Groups and the local community to organise events and activities in our green spaces.

## **5. HABITAT SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES**

### **i. Grass : Verges, Parks, Pitches, Burial Ground**

CPC has specified in its grass cutting tender for roadside verges and splays that an area of uncut grass be left as a biodiversity strip on all verges save for 1 meter adjacent to the roadside or footpath to enhance visibility for pedestrians and motorists [ unless where to do so would compromise road safety]

CPC will also ensure that there is a margin of uncut grass around all hedges managed by the Council to allow longer grasses to grow.

Grass cuttings will be left in situ in all locations save for the burial ground and Pitches.

### **ii. Hedgerows**

Hedgerows are a priority habitat in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) and can be of high value to biodiversity are well-managed and species-rich, providing shade, shelter, and a range of habitats.

CPC will:

- Continue to cut hedges place twice a year, - this is very much a balancing act as a number of Parish Council hedges run alongside narrow, well used footpaths so require cutting. ( Churchdown Park : Chapel Hay ).  
There are no hedge works during the bird breeding season CPC will consider leaving hedge cuttings in place on the ground to encourage use by respective animals and invertebrates ( unless this is on a public footpath or PROW)
- Identify hedges needing restoration work (gapping up, coppicing) and those that will be left to grow out – both of which are valuable for wildlife.
- Increase the diversity of single-species hedges by incorporating a range of native hedging species or including flowering and fruiting species.
- Create a buffer strip of biodiversity grass or meadow extending two metres from the base of the hedge.
- Allow trees to grow up within the hedge

### **iii. Trees**

Trees are an extremely valuable habitat for wildlife both as standards and copses.

Trees on CPC owned or managed land will not be felled unless diseased, dead or dangerous. Any that are felled for safety reasons will be replaced with appropriate species. CPC will allow fallen tree branches and dead wood to remain, if safe, as a habitat for invertebrates.

#### **a. Wooded areas**

Copses and wooded areas are of high value to biodiversity and can support many more species than the same area of any other park habitat.

CPC has wooded areas at the Burial Ground, Orchard, Nature Reserve, Pocket Park and Ponds Area

#### **CPC will consider the following options for trees:**

- Develop a wide range of tree ages and sizes from young regeneration to standing damaged or dead trees.
- Consider planting trees where appropriate on low value amenity grassland where this does not impact recreation or amenity.
- Introduce woodland wildflowers and ground flora
- Where there is dense tree cover, allow glades and pathways to increase sunlight reaching the ground which will stimulate undergrowth.
- Leave logs, prunings and other dead wood in place to decompose or create nearby log piles, including standing dead wood where it does pose a risk to the public or compromise the visual amenity of a site.
- Create a buffer strip of long grass around the edge of copses and under trees.

#### **b. Single standard trees**

Single trees can be of great value to biodiversity if allowed to mature and reach a good size. Tree species which flower and produce fruit are valuable to pollinators in summer and birds in winter. CPC will:

- Leave grass uncut underneath single trees, to a radius of 50 cm or more where viable.
- Plant bulbs underneath single trees to provide spring colour where resources allow.
- Encourage or introduce wildflowers underneath single trees to maintain display after bulb flowering.
- Leave dead wood in place on trees unless it poses a safety risk.
- Install bat or bird boxes where appropriate to increase nesting habitat, bearing in mind the need for bird box maintenance.

### **c. Deadwood Areas**

Standing and fallen deadwood are important habitats for a huge range of invertebrates and fungi. Deadwood includes fallen branches, felled trees, log piles, dead branches on living trees and standing dead trees. Similarly compost heaps provide additional resources of dead plant matter for fungi and invertebrates to feed on and inhabit; the compost can be used in horticultural operations once it has broken down.

#### **CPC will consider the following options:**

- Leave some dead trees and shrubs standing (whilst having regard to both health & safety and aesthetics)
- Leave some old tree and shrub stumps to decay naturally.
- Create log piles from cuttings of various thicknesses, leave in contact with the ground, in light shade, and in a compact pile.
- Create compost heaps, fed with grass cuttings, strimmings from herbaceous perennials, old bedding plants, and chipped wood.

### **iv. Play Areas**

These are of low value to biodiversity but there are opportunities to enhance them for wildlife, which can make them more engaging for young people and provide some natural play opportunities.

### **CPC will consider the following options :**

- Install bat and insect boxes where appropriate.
- If resources allow, to incorporate planting trees/shrubs into play areas, whilst having
- regard for safety and vandalism considerations.
- Consider creating natural play features with logs, sticks for den making or water.

### **v. Allotments**

CPC manages 150 allotments across two sites. Allotments are ideal places for biodiversity.

The sheer number and density of different plants and habitats brings a huge diversity of invertebrates, birds, and other wildlife

Allotment holders can be encouraged to garden in a wildlife friendly way. For example, delaying the winter tidy up until March will retain dry plant stems and seed heads, which provide winter food for birds and places to rest and hibernate for invertebrates. Allotment holders can also be encouraged to avoid peat and pesticides, provide water for birds, and leave some plants to bolt to provide extra flowers for pollinators.

The common areas of CPC allotments provide opportunities to create new habitats to benefit wildlife. CPC allotments need to be assessed for potential biodiversity enhancements which could include the following.

- Planting native or fruit trees on common areas.
- Create hedgerows along boundaries. Natives like hawthorn, blackthorn, holly, and brambles can be mixed with non-native pyracantha or Japanese rose to create a hedge rich in flowers and berries for wildlife. These species are all thorny so double-up as a security measure.
- Allow scrub areas to develop in uncultivated corners and edges of the allotment.
- Affix bat and bird or owl boxes to mature trees.

- Create habitat piles using stones and dead wood. This will be used by many different invertebrates as well as amphibians, reptiles, and hedgehogs. Compost heaps are also good habitats for wildlife

### **vii. Community Orchard**

The orchard will be sensitively managed in accordance with iv above : grass cutting will be kept to a minimum of 3-4 times per year.

### **viii. Nature Reserve**

The orchard will be sensitively managed in accordance with the habitat specific principles set out above ( iii a Wooded Areas )

### **ix. Ponds**

Ponds are defined as man-made or natural waterbodies between 1m<sup>2</sup> and 2 ha in area which hold water for 4 months of the year or more (Pond Conservation Group, 1993). Ponds are the least protected, and richest, of freshwater habitats - are a linchpin habitat within the water environment. ( wildlife and countryside link 2023)

A comparison of the number of invertebrate animal species collected from 600 rivers and 150 ponds across Britain showed that, in total, the ponds supported more invertebrate species than rivers and had greater number of rare animals. ( CPRE 2023)

The ponds area at Churchdown Park is sensitively managed by staff , contractors and volunteers. Works are scheduled according to the seasons and any vegetation from ponds such as blanket or water soldiers is left on the banks as a habitat for wildlife including invertebrates.

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<sup>i</sup> C&I NP 2018-2031 page 24 <https://www.churchdownandinnsworthplan.co.uk/>