

Minutes of the Biodiversity Group meeting held on 28th September 2026

In the chair: Clare Kendrick Robinson (CKR)

Present: Stephen Novy (SN), Alison Shelley (AS), Glyn Evans (GE), Clare Shirley (CS), Simon Blaxill (SB), Jez Gladwin (JG), Mark Leitch (ML), Gail Parker (GP), Roger Hawkins (RH), Penny Simpson (PS), Pete Connery (PC), Laurie Bussis (LB), Alexandra Rook (AR), Michael Padmore (MP), Liz Taylor Jones (LTJ), Nancy Baynes (NB), Mark Halladay (MH).

Apologies: Josephine Kingsford, Michael Smither, Michael Barnard, Julia Mason, Andrea Williams, Janie Grote, Hester Lucas, Jan Tyne, Carolyn Appleby.

[For a summary of proposed actions arising from the meeting, go to the end of these minutes].

1. Chair's welcome: CKR welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Small group discussion of priorities for the autumn

The meeting broke into small groups and for ten minutes discussed priorities for the coming months. The following is a list of suggestions that were made (in no specific order):

1. The tree group to implement its plan for planting street trees and to look for local residents to help with watering;
2. Establish a dry garden group drawing on the experience of Beth Chatto, Wivenhoe in Bloom and the Wivenhoe gardens of LTJ and SN to identify drought resistant (and nature friendly) plants for future planting around the town;
3. Promote ponds and container ponds for wildlife during summer droughts;
4. Explore promotional opportunities to publicise the group's activities;
5. Write a plan for supporting the local community in dealing with the effects of climate change (drought, fire risks, food and water shortages, etc);
6. Liaise with the Net Zero Group on issues of joint interest and apply for grants to support common objectives;
7. Find out about the plans for gardening/nature at Broomgrove schools and whether they would welcome more volunteers;
8. Encourage more residents to garden for nature;
9. Expand the nascent wildflower meadow at Millfields Green, and explore the possibility of getting it transferred to the Biodiversity Community Interest Company;
10. Enhance the existing community orchards in the Jubilee Garden and in the Cut (between Ernest Road and the Avenue); explore opportunities for community orchards elsewhere in the town;
11. Continue discussions with Tarmac about the Biodiversity Net Gain value of the land at the top of Rectory Hill.

Actions: Any group members interested in helping to take forward any of the autumn priorities should contact one of the co-chairs (Glyn Evans, Clare Kendrick Robinson, Roger Hawkins).

3. Street trees update

GP reported on the current plans of the street trees group. In stage 1 they are applying to Essex County Council to plant 27 silver birches at already identified locations. It will be important to gain the support of nearby residents to look after the trees by watering them regularly during the first two years after planting. In stage 2 they will aim to plant a more diverse range of 13 broadleaf trees in 2027. They are looking into the cost of purchasing a water bowser so that watering of the trees does not entirely depend on residents.

On the verges beside the Coop the plan is now to erect raised beds and plant with drought-resistant plants (rather than planting trees).

The tree group will be staffing a stall outside the Coop on Sunday 4th October from 11am to inform the public about the work of the group.

Action: The Tree Group to get permission for planting 27 silver birches and carry out planting, and to source the materials to construct raised beds on the verges by the Coop.

4. Nature discovery day in Wivenhoe

The Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) team are organising a series of Nature Discovery Days in various locations around the county. They have asked the Biodiversity Group to organise one in Wivenhoe. GE, CKR and RH will have a Zoom meeting with them on 5th October to discuss what form this might take in Wivenhoe. The first Nature Discovery Day will take place in Brightlingsea on Saturday 17th October. To book a place email enquiries@essexrcc.org.uk or phone Susie Jenkins on 07527 00 36 55.

Action: GE, CKR and RH to report back to the group on plans for a Nature Discovery Day in Wivenhoe.

5. Net Zero Group

Councillor Stephen Burke organised a first meeting of the re-constituted Net Zero Group on 24th August. The meeting came up with over 30 suggestions, both quick wins and longer-term projects, for moving towards net zero, a number of which bear potentially on the work of the Biodiversity Group:

- Creating “cool zones”, e.g. through tree shading
- Increasing green spaces in Wivenhoe
- Nature friendly allotments
- Community orchards
- Discouraging block paving
- Removing concrete, where possible
- Assessing the risk of wildfires
- A Community Climate Festival to be held in 2027

In relation to one of the suggestions made by the Net Zero Group – to encourage households to install solar panels – MP asked if WTC could provide clear guidance on whether planning permission is required to install solar panels in conservation areas.

Action: The Biodiversity Group to liaise with the Net Zero Group on actions of mutual interest.

Action: The Biodiversity Group to find out whether planning permission is needed for the installation of solar panels in conservation areas.

6. Wivenhoe resilience plan (against heat, wildfires, food and water shortages, etc)

Julia Mason had circulated a paper prior to the meeting which provided a link to Colchester City Council's guidance on preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies ([Emergencies | Colchester City Council](#)). She had also spoken to Wivenhoe Mayor, Glynis Hailes Morley, who had reported that WTC has emergency planning guidance which needs updating.

It was suggested that developing a policy for dealing with climate-related emergencies might be a joint objective of the Biodiversity and Net Zero Groups.

7. Broadfields Nature Reserve

RH reported that the lead at Taylor Wimpey on this, Shannan Murdock, had recently indicated that the works needed to turn the land into a nature reserve “are programmed and being coordinated, with the intention of ensuring the reserve is in a suitable position ahead of transfer [to Wivenhoe Biodiversity Group Community Interest Company]” and that our solicitors and theirs are in contact to deal with the legal side of transferring the land.

8. Broomgrove Schools “Grow” project

CKR reported that she, RH and Hazel Laurence would be meeting with two of the junior school teachers with responsibility for outdoor activities (gardening for food and nature). I can report the meeting subsequently took place and a plan is now in place for volunteers to go to the school to help out on Monday and Tuesday mornings.

9. Wivenhoe as a Strategic Biodiversity Area

MH outlined how current planning law affects the creation of what he called “habitat banks”. A habitat bank “is a biodiversity net gain area of land managed long-term to create, restore or enhance natural wildlife habitats and generate measurable biodiversity units”. Colchester City Council has designated several areas of Wivenhoe as potential habitat banks. MH suggested WTC should make a case to CCC for nature recovery/enhancement in 4 areas. (1) the “coalescence gap” – the green buffer between the University and the town; (2) a strategic biodiversity area running from the coalescence gap down the east side of the town to the river; (3) the central urban settlement area of Wivenhoe; (4) The woods/lower lodge farm/ferry marsh (which already have a CCC-determined management plan). This would

involve ongoing discussion with developers and landowners, best undertaken under the auspices of WTC. He offered to take this idea forward to the town council's Planning Committee.

MH also called for help with transferring anecdotal observations of local nature, e.g. on Wivenhoe Natural History Group WhatsApp to more formal nature recording sites such as the British Trust for Ornithology.

Action: MH to represent the Biodiversity Group on WTC Planning Committee and to take forward his "4 habitat banks" plan.

Action: Call for a volunteer to help MH transfer anecdotal records of nature to professional registers.

10. Train Station House Garden Adopters

This was a topic raised during the discussion of priorities (item 2) and is worth clarifying. It has been noted before that the station house garden has been neglected for a while and given its potential contribution to biodiversity, the group wondered whether any help might be offered to the current "station adopters". ML has, on our behalf, pursued this matter over the past year. He offered to become one of the adoptees, but discovered that the rail company only allows there to be 2 adoptees. Neither of the current adoptees is willing to give up their role, even though one of them is unable to work on the garden for health reasons. ML has maintained contact with the one active adopter, Catherine, and has helped with some watering, clearing and discussed sourcing of some new climate-resilient plants. His hope is that by maintaining an informal link, when a vacancy arises he will be in a position to apply for it.

11. Any other business

(a) Action: GP agreed to write a piece for Wivenhoe News about the street tree plan.

(b) SN reported on a documentary film shown at the University on 14th September about the work being done to protect and improve the rivers Roding and Cam. It showed volunteers, including Brownies, working by and in the rivers, removing rubbish and invasive species and restoring meanders, allowing wildlife to return and thrive in these chalk streams. SN suggests the film's "relevance to us here in Wivenhoe lies mainly in its stress on cooperation between groups engaged, like ours, in protecting and enhancing biodiversity, so that ideas and methods are shared, and in the thrill of making a difference that lasts".

(c) The film "Derek vs Derek" (depicting the ongoing disagreement between two neighbouring farmers called Derek, one of whom is an advocate of rewilding while the other is a traditional intensive farmer) is being shown at the **William Loveless Hall on Tuesday 20th October at 7.30** as part of the Moving Image series.

(d) The film "National Emergency Briefing", hosted by Chris Packham, involves 10 experts talking about different aspects of the biodiversity and climate crisis. In between Chris sits

down with members of the public. **The film will be shown at the William Loveless Hall on Tuesday 10th November at 7.30.**

Date and time of next meeting: tbc

Summary of actions

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Action: GE, CKR and RH to report back to the group on plans for a Nature Discovery Day in Wivenhoe.

Action: The Biodiversity Group to liaise with the Net Zero Group on actions of mutual interest.

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