Benson Nature Group
Caring for Benson's green spaces

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE ADVICE FOR DEVELOPERS

Benson has much to cherish in its green spaces and wildlife interest, and the community has told us that it values contact with wildlife as a feature of life in the village. New development can play a role in helping to deliver the objectives set out in Benson's People & Nature Strategy through provision of new green infrastructure and biodiversity enhancements that take account of locally relevant priorities.

Design Considerations:

The People and Nature Strategy sets out to maintain and enhance Benson's Ecological Network. It seeks the following:

- maintenance of existing green assets;
- continued permeability of the village to a range of wildlife through incorporating green infrastructure and biodiversity enhancements into the fabric of new developments;
- provision of nectar sources for a range of locally important pollinator species;
- the creation of new wildflower meadows and enhancement of amenity grassland areas for biodiversity, including by building in wildflower margins.

1. PLANTING FOR POLLINATORS

Design principles: Planting [extracted from Benson Neighbourhood Plan Design Statement]

P1: Hedges - Existing hedges should be preserved as far as possible, but where new or replacement hedges are proposed, a diversity of species should be planted rather than single species hedging. The hedge should comprise a mix of native species - hawthorn (local varieties), blackthorn, buckthorn, spindle, and crab apple. It is important that the varieties chosen do not have double flowers as those are of limited value to the pollinators we are seeking to encourage.

P2: Hedges shall be planted as double rows of whips, staggered in a zig zag pattern so gaps are filled, with approx 50cm between rows. A margin of at least 3m should be provided at the base to buffer the hedge and provide space for a range of species (see wildflower margin text below).

P3: Woodland Planting: The choice of species depends on the purpose of the woodland (eg landscape screening or biodiversity interest). Sites in the proximity of RAF Benson's runway approach and departure points should seek specialist advice. For small copses, the following species will provide nectar in the spring and berries in the winter: Spindle, Buckthorn, Bird and/or Wild Cherry, Crab Apple, Guelder Rose and Service Tree. These are all fairly low growing - using 1m spacing creates a copse.

P4: For landscape screening or larger trees designed to grow as standards, ecologically appropriate species should be chosen, including consideration of disease-resistant elms to replace those lost to Dutch Elm Disease.

P5: When planting community orchards, consideration should be given to striping off 100mm of topsoil before commencing planting. Locally relevant varieties of fruit trees should be planted, with a spacing of c4.5m. Trees will need to have vigorous rootstocks as Benson is prone to heavy frosts, and cages should be provided to prevent damage by rabbits/deer. To increase the wildlife value of the site, a wildflower meadow mix should be sown between the trees. A path and benches should be provided to encourage community use. A sound management plan, with community support, is required for such proposals so that the orchard is successfully established and maintained in the long term. Regular watering is likely to be required for the first few years, along with annual pruning, weeding around the tree bases, and mowing and removal of meadow vegetation. (Further technical advice is provided in this Natural England leaflet: http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/97004)

P6: Wild flower margins on amenity grass areas should have a well-defined curved edge to mown areas. This adds interest for both humans and wildlife, is visually pleasing, and helps manage any concerns that the area is messy or unmanaged. Margins should be a minimum of 3m in width but preferably 6m.

P7: Wild flower meadows should be sown with a butterfly and bee wildflower or standard general purpose meadow mixture of seed, providing wildflowers that are likely to be robust, such as knapweed, vetches, bird's-foot trefoil, yarrow, selfheal and red clover. (WFG18 may be appropriate). Ryegrass in the mix should be avoided. Basic meadow mixes are readily available from seed companies. The margins will need more management in the first couple of years but then should be fairly low maintenance.

2. INCLUSION OF BIODIVERSITY ENHANCEMENTS IN DEVELOPMENTS

a. Swifts

[The following text is extracted from the website below for ease.]

'Swift bricks, hollow blocks sized to hold a nest, are an excellent way to provide swifts with nesting opportunities. They should be fitted either on a side of the building that gets some shade during the day, or under an overhang or under the eaves, to give protection from heat, but not over windows or near to vents. They should be sited in the top course of block work, at least 5 metres above ground, with clear adjacent airspace so the Swifts can access them in high-speed direct flight (they usually fly straight in and out).'

Technical guides on positioning of the Manthorpe type of swift brick can be found here.
http://manthorpebuildingproducts.co.uk/product/gswb-swift-nest-brick

For further advice on positioning swift bricks and information on the range of options on the market, please see the following links:

https://www.swift-conservation.org/Leaflet%204%20-%20Swift%20Nest%20Bricks%20-%20installation%20%26%20suppliers-small.pdfhttps://drive.google.com/file/d/0B3YAfjezSBIiOE9OZlVJR0YwY1E/edit

b. Hedgehog Runs

Hedgehog runs through garden fences are a very simple measure that can make a real difference to a species that is undergoing serious decline. The required holes are very small (13cm diameter), but enable hedgehogs to travel around to find food and mates. Off-the-peg hedgehog-friendly fencing solutions are available from a number of suppliers - further advice is available at https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/help-hedgehogs/link-your-garden/.