

EMERGENCY MOTION – ACTION FOR INSECTS

Executive Summary

Insect populations in the UK have suffered drastic declines, with far-reaching consequences for both wildlife and human well-being. As pollinators of one-third of our food crops and a critical component of food webs, the continued loss of insects poses a grave threat to biodiversity, ecosystem health, and ultimately our ability to address climate change effectively.

Recent reports indicate that 41% of the Earth's remaining five million insect species are now threatened with extinction, with the UK experiencing losses of 50% or more since 1970. This alarming trend is exacerbated by habitat loss, pesticide use, and other environmental pressures, many of which are linked to climate change.

Ashington Town Council has a unique opportunity to take immediate action to support insect populations and promote biodiversity. This report proposes a comprehensive set of measures, including:

1. Making a public commitment to help insects and other wildlife thrive.
2. Signing up to The Wildlife Trust's 'Take Action for Insects' initiative.
3. Embedding considerations for insect recovery into all maintenance and environmental decisions.
4. Creating and restoring insect-friendly habitats on council-managed lands.
5. Investigating and reducing pesticide use on allotment sites and in grounds maintenance.
6. Promoting public awareness and engagement through citizen science initiatives and educational campaigns.

By implementing these actions, Ashington Town Council can demonstrate leadership in addressing the challenges of insect decline and climate change. Restoring insect populations will contribute to broader environmental resilience, support local ecosystems, and align with the council's climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

This report calls upon the Climate Change Committee to prioritise insect conservation as a critical component of the council's climate action plan. Decisive and collaborative action is urgently needed to reverse the alarming decline of insect populations and safeguard the future health of our environment and communities

The Situation

In the UK, our insect populations have suffered drastic declines, which are set to have far-reaching consequences for both wildlife and people.

With a third of our food crops pollinated by insects, and as many as 87% of our plants pollinated by animals (and in the majority by insects) there is a lot to lose. Much of our wildlife, be it birds, bats, reptiles, amphibians, small mammals or fish, rely on insects for food. Without them, we risk the collapse of our natural world.

A report, *Insect Declines and Why They Matter*, published in November 2019 by an alliance of Wildlife Trusts in the south-west, brought together evidence that showed the loss of 50% or more of our insects since 1970, and the shocking reality that 41% of the Earth's remaining five million insect species are now 'threatened with extinction'.

Read the full report 'Insects Decline and Why they Matter' in the link below:

https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/FULL%20AFI%20REPORT%20WEB1_1.pdf

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Today, 41% of insects face extinction. BUT it's not too late. The Council can act itself, and also encourage residents to take action at home and in the community.

Read the full report 'Reversing the Decline of Insects' in the link below:

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/Reversing%20the%20Decline%20of%20Insects%20Report%20-EMBARGO%2008.07.20%20%282%29.pdf>

How can Local Authorities support nature?

Local Authorities manage lots of areas, from parks to road verges to the grounds of office buildings and hospitals. This adds up to a huge area that could be supporting wildlife. But in cities, towns, and villages across the country hundreds of tonnes of toxic chemicals are used, often several times a year, damaging the health of both wildlife and people. Many of these areas are also strimmed, leaving town centres that are tidy - but driving plants and animals to the brink of extinction.

It doesn't have to be this way. There are lots of things that Local Authorities can do to support thriving biodiversity in urban areas. Cities, towns, and villages can be great for wildlife and great for people too.

Northumberland County Council expect to look at their Grounds Maintenance soon, and we know that biodiversity is at the heart of this. Ashington Town Council can lead the way by seeking the views of the community now, taking positive action ourselves and promoting public awareness.

What can Ashington Town Council do?

The Wildlife Trust have put together some easy, often cost-saving, ways to cover several policy, practical and engagement related actions for Local Authorities. **Using this as a guide the Council is asked to agree the following:**

1. Make a public commitment to help insects and other wildlife thrive. Engage with other community groups and share our statement.
2. Sign up to [The Wildlife Trust's 'Take Action for Insects'](#).
3. Commit to thinking about and embedding the impact on insects, and recovery of insects in every maintenance/environmental decision we take.
4. Create areas under Town Council management that can be 'left wild' and/or create and restore insect-friendly habitat.
 - o Work with Community Groups to make it happen.
 - o Achieve four areas by the end of the summer.
5. Seek feedback from residents on areas in Ashington that could be 'left wild' or restored with insect-friendly habitat.
 - o Engage with landowners to help make it happen.
 - o Engage with Community Groups and others the make it happen.
6. Investigate our use of pesticides on allotment sites, and in grounds maintenance.
 - o Reduce and eliminate use of pesticides where possible.
 - o Work with allotment associations to share the message.
7. Promote awareness of the issues and action that can be taken on allotment sites, by ourselves and allotment tenants.
 - o Support and incentivise action for insects.
 - o Work with allotment associations.
8. Promote awareness of the issues and action that can be taken by residents at home.
 - o Promote the ['Bugs Matter' citizen science survey](#) running from June 1 to August 31.

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- In advance of the official first day of spring – 20th March - Share the Wildlife Trust's 15 Things you can do at home to help insects: one each day.
 - Ask those who get involved to send in photographs.
 - Celebrate what people have done to help and restore insects at home.
 - Offer free wildflower seeds to everyone who takes part.
 - Create collage of action to be shown at our Eco-Fair.
 - Aim to achieve at least one example of each activity.



Concluding comments

The decline of insect populations poses an existential threat to our ecosystems, food security, and ultimately our ability to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The alarming data presented in this report leaves no doubt that urgent action is required at all levels.

The Climate Change Committee must seize this opportunity to position Ashington as a trailblazer in the fight against biodiversity loss and climate change. Together, we can create a sustainable future where thriving insect populations contribute to vibrant ecosystems, a stable climate, and a healthier, more resilient Ashington for generations to come.