**LIMPSFIELD BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN (LBAP)**

**LIMPSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL**

**Introduction and Summary**

Local Government bodies are now required by law to produce biodiversity strategies, and the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty came into force on 1 January 2023. This applies to all public bodies. Surrey County Council and Tandridge District Council are required to deliver a Biodiversity Report detailing ‘a summary of action taken to comply with the duty’. The first report is due in January 2026. Whilst Parish Councils are not required to produce a report they are asked to contribute to County and District plans and to develop a biodiversity action plan at local level. This means liaising with the District, particularly to develop the biodiversity net gain process (BNG) which is required for planning applications from 12 February 2024, and to work alongside the county on projects in the parish. Limpsfield Parish Council has an important role in considering planning applications and will now additionally scrutinise these from a BNG perspective.

Limpsfield Parish Council wants to get ahead now and produce an initial strategy and action plan, which can then dovetail with other bodies’ strategies. Joint working with others will be critical. Biodiversity is already a policy of the parish. Policy 8 of the Limpsfield Neighbourhood Plan (2019) is entitled ‘PROMOTING BIODIVERSITY’ and states that:

* Development proposals should not result in a net loss of existing on-site biodiversity assets, delivering ‘net gain’’ where possible by providing for wildlife needs on site.

Improving biodiversity is an overarching need nationwide and does not stop at the borders of Limpsfield parish. This plan is the result of contributions by a range of stakeholders who came together to discuss biodiversity. It will be distributed to these stakeholders and also discussed with neighbouring parishes, so that we can work together to improve the biodiversity across the area,

Biodiversity might be defined as all the different kinds of life you find in one area - the variety of animals, plants, fungi, even micro-organisms like bacteria that make up our natural world. It is our responsibility to the next generation to pass that on in as good condition as we can.

This document is in three parts:

1. a description of the natural environment across the Parish and the legislative context,
2. a brief strategy for how the Parish Council would like to protect and enhance our biodiversity,
3. an initial action plan for 2024-25 with some specific actions that will be taken by the Council itself and together with individual residents, and neighbourhood and community groups. This might include site surveys in conjunction with partners.

The Council plans to bring this document to the Parish Annual meeting held in St Peter’s Parish Hall on 25 April for discussion. It will be publicised on the Council’s website, and everyone in the parish will be invited to comment. There will also be some sources of guidance and ideas promoted on the Council’s website.

**The Natural Environment across our Parish**

Limpsfield Parish includes the village of Limpsfield (a conservation area), Limpsfield Chart, Limpsfield Common, Pains Hill, Itchingwood Common and Staffhurst Wood. The parish is 1,855 hectares in size. Exceptionally, it is 94% green belt, with a high proportion of natural green space close to settlements, including large publicly accessible areas, some nationally important heathland and ancient woodland. Quite a lot of the land is owned by the National Trust or the Titsey Estate, and a good proportion is farmed. (It is noted that the existing Area of Natural Beauty designation (Surrey Hills) is likely to be extended in the coming months to include the areas currently known as Areas of Great Landscape Value.)

It is important to acknowledge at the outset that there is much good work that has been and is now being carried out by groups and individuals to promote biodiversity in the parish. Examples include Limpsfield in Bloom, heathland restoration (National Trust), the community orchard and initiatives at Hazelwood School.

We are fortunate too that a number of biodiversity surveys have recently been conducted in the parish, including a major exercise in 2018 on the National Trust land. This gives us valuable baseline information which can be used to measure progress in future. To give just a few examples, in our parish we have red kites, the rare lemon slug and some spectacular autumn fungi. To keep this document concise, we have chosen not to include detailed information, but the Council will ensure that publicly available surveys can be accessed online.

The different types of land within the parish very significantly, depending partly on the underlying geology. For example, some soils are sandy, while others are heavy clay. Naturally this influences the different flowers and animals to be found there. Although the parish has a north-south axis, as shown in the map at annex 1, the south-facing slopes of the North Downs form a potential natural landscape corridor running east to west.

There are two main rivers in the area, the River Eden that rises at the foot of the North Downs close to Titsey, and the Crooked River that runs through the South of the Parish. Both rivers are Surrey County Council Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA) and have great potential for improving biodiversity.

Other local government bodies, such as Surrey County Council, Tandridge Council, are formulating their own biodiversity strategies. Limpsfield Parish Council had already developed its own local Neighbourhood Plan (LNP) that was ‘made’ by Tandridge District Council in June 2019. This plan identified nine designated Local Green Spaces, which fit with wider principles for securing sustainable development in the area.

The planning policies in the LNP seek to protect our local countryside and green spaces. In particular, Policy LNP 8 is entitled ‘Promoting Biodiversity’ and recognises the need to minimise the impact of new development on the natural ecology of the parish and as far as possible secure gains rather than losses in biodiversity.

Another imminent important factor is the introduction, by central Government, of the planning requirement for biodiversity net gain (BNG) to be achieved in larger developments. This is intended to ensure the promotion of biodiversity when planning applications are considered. Tandridge District Council is currently working to develop BNG for their larger planning applications.

When we come to review the next phase of Limpsfield’s strategy, it will be important to draw on these wider developments. We will stay in contact with these other organisations so that we can help with communication and development of broader ideas and activities. Examples of other key organisations include the Surrey Nature Partnership, and the AONB (now Surrey Hills National Landscape.)

**Limpsfield Parish Council’s Preliminary Strategy**

The Parish Council is very aware of the escalating climate and nature crisis; it aims to be environmentally conscious in all our considerations and decisions. But the Council is only one part of the complex jigsaw of responsibilities we all share to promote biodiversity and to care for nature.

There are many stakeholders who can be involved, though probably the most significant scope for impacting on biodiversity – for good or ill – rests with individual residents and on what they do in their lifestyle, their gardens and in the local community. Accordingly, the Council is determined to work in partnership with residents, farmers, community groups etc.

First, for matters on which the Council is directly responsible, we will take into account the impact on biodiversity in the decisions we make by seeking to minimise adverse impacts on biodiversity and identifying opportunities to increase it where practicable. The Council has limited funding, but it will commit to ensure that a proportion is ring-fenced for promoting biodiversity - some specific initial actions in the next 12 months are set out in the third section of this paper.

Second, the Council is determined to work closely with a wide range of partners. Initial discussions have already been held with some farmers and landowners, school and community group representatives, and interested residents. One proposal for the coming year is to establish an initial biodiversity group as a forum for the exchange of ideas and promotion of good practice.

Third, the Council will develop further liaison with third parties such as the National Trust and Surrey Wildlife Trust, to tap into their particular expertise. The Council will also explore the scope for citizen science, to include family-friendly events such as a bio-blitz, nature walks and bug hunts.

Fourth, the Council will develop a communications strategy using both its own media and other local media as vehicles for promoting biodiversity, especially in ways that actively help groups and individuals with specific projects.

**The Initial Action Plan for 2024-25**

This section of the paper aims to set out some specific actions that are planned to be undertaken in the coming 12 months:

1. to communicate the importance of promoting biodiversity, the Council plan to
2. present this draft paper at the spring Annual Meeting;
3. work with local schools to prepare a leaflet to accompany the next Parish Newsletter which is issued to all residents in the parish;
4. use a wide range of other media outlets to publicise events, opportunities, good practice by farmers and others, and guidance.
5. The Council will work with Tandridge District Council, adding the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) process to its scrutiny of planning applications.
6. The Council will introduce a new scheme of small grants for groups (which need not necessarily be formally constituted) within the Parish which wish to implement specific biodiversity actions, such as planting an area with wildflower seeds, bringing on native varieties of plants which can be shared, or erecting bird boxes or bug houses.
7. The Council will produce, with expert partners, a monthly calendar providing seasonal guidance to groups and residents on practical tips; examples might include no mow may, sustainable planting, a reminder to keep dogs on leads where there may be ground-nesting birds, ways to help hedgehogs or when to sow bee-friendly plants, tree holes, wild life corridors*.*
8. The Council will liaise with other organisations to inspect the water quality of the two main rivers in the Parish – the river Eden and the crooked river.
9. A series of events will be organised in liaison with the National Trust and other bodies to celebrate biodiversity and to encourage the public’s understanding of nature, including Ranger-led walks. This might include information at the Limpsfield Village Fete.
10. The Council will explore the scope for more detailed mapping of the parish to identify any other specific areas where the scope for increasing biodiversity is not yet been fully recognised. This could identify additional landscape corridors which are so vital for sustaining biodiversity.
11. The Council will continue the discussion both with the biodiversity forum within the parish, and with external bodies, including adjacent Councils, so that a fuller strategy and potentially a three-year action plan can be brought forward in 2025

The Parish Council has already stated its interest in biodiversity and set aside a budget in principle for 24/25. A detailed plan based on the proposed actions above will be submitted to the Parish Council for agreement.

Meanwhile the Biodiversity subgroup, reporting to the LNP committee, will keep in touch with other organisations to offer support as needed.

**ANNEX 1 Limpsfield Parish Map**

