

I am heritage champion for Wychavon and a member of the Dev Control committee though not of the ruling group. I farm and am chairman of Kemerton Conservation Trust, a charity that promotes the conservation of nature and landscape in Worcestershire and adjacent counties and focuses its activities around Bredon Hill and the Lower Severn. In my time I have been chairman of the RSPB, Plantlife and the JNCC so I come to this job with nearly thirty years experience of nature conservation.

When I was asked to be Heritage Champion I asked that my role should include the natural heritage as well as the built one as that was where my particular expertise lay. The County Council Heritage Champion, Cllr Rob Adams, also covers the natural heritage. I did this just after the NERC act came into force although the timing was fortuitous.¹

Under Section 40(1) the Council has a duty, in exercising its functions, to have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.² This report by Defra tells local authorities how to fulfil this duty. It says we can do so most effectively by integrating biodiversity into public plans, policies and programmes, and encouraging conservation action through national and local BAPs. My role as champion is to encourage this process at every level in the council's working, and to enthuse people about the beauty and economic importance of nature. This shouldn't be too hard. When we carried out a survey of our residents to find out why they liked living in Wychavon, the natural beauty of the district came near the top of their list.

The instructions we are given in this document assume that we know what 'conserving biodiversity' means.

I am not sure that everyone does. I am often asked what I think it means in the context of my own farm. If we were living in a purely natural system like an untouched rain forest then it means leaving the system to function naturally. That is to conserve the plants and animals that are already there. In Britain where the landscape has been manipulated by man for at least four millennia we can't aim for this. It certainly is not to grow as many species as possible from all over the world. What we seek to do is to maintain semi-natural habitats – communities of **native** plants and animals which have co-evolved with man and are the result of a pattern of management which has been unchanged over many centuries. These are typically very rich communities and are what we think of as the most important sites ³ –such as old meadows (you should all recognise Eades Meadow) ⁴ ancient woodland ⁵ or even individual veteran trees. Worcestershire is very well blessed with all of these. Indeed considering its small size and its distance from the coast, it is amazing what a high proportion of Britain's biodiversity it holds.

⁶. So conservation first means. Identifying and safeguarding our most important sites and native species. This means continuing to manage them as they always have been managed – not abandoning them or shutting them up.

Then we should recognise that most of our semi-natural habitats have been affected to a greater or lesser degree by modern life. **7** Many of our surviving meadows, like this one at Kemerton, have received some spray or fertiliser (and indeed much of this comes from car exhausts via the rain and not from the farmer's fertiliser spreader.) There is still the possibility to save these by reapplying the old methods of management in a modern guise. (i.e. we can use tractors rather than horses and can make judicious use of herbicides)

8. So secondly restore damaged semi-natural habitats.

9. Thirdly create new habitats. Some times these are transient habitats that mimic natural processes. **10** So the working face of a gravel pit is the same to sand=martins as the crumbling bank of a river undercut by winter floods. Sometimes what you are trying to produce is a site that with time will develop most of the characteristics of an old semi-natural habitat. **11** – say limestone grassland like this. I say with time – perhaps 100 years for grassland, 400 for woodland. – This time gives you a measure of value, but you also need scarcity and richness.

12. Fourthly, for the rest of the land, manage it in as benign a way as possible so as to maintain a healthy population of familiar wild plants and animals. - **13.** This is often what the general public feels most strongly about - seeing poppies in corn fields and hearing skylarks and blackbirds singing.

As I say, this is the approach I have used on my own farm. Does it work for a local authority. I think it should be able to do so, for the protection and enhancement of existing semi-natural sites so long as the LA has appropriate partnerships. This is where the BAPartnership comes in. Natural England, The Worcs Wildlife Trust and the Worcs Biological Records Centre should be able to answer the question for Worcestershire-where are our priority sites and species to be found. Natural England through HLS ought to be able to assure the appropriate management. The planning authority WCC and Wychavon ought to be able to ensure that the sites are protected from development. The essential thing here is communication between partners. Wychavon does not have the knowledge itself to safeguard sites – but it does have local eyes and ears. However there are gaps in the system. Case of Naunton Beauchamp. Who is responsible for enforcing? NE only objects to things which damage the notified interest of SSSIs. County Wildlife Sites do look at full range of interests, but badly out of date – none of Kemerton Sites are CWS. BRC has a lot of data which is only tetrad based and therefore cannot be used for site safeguard.

It is when it comes to the creation of new habitats the planning authority will have an important role to play. These habitats are likely to be produced as a by-product of development – and indeed the most diverse site managed by the Kemerton Conservation **14** Trust was created by sand and gravel extraction. In such sites we should not aim to be too prescriptive in attempting to mimic a specific semi-natural habitat. By providing an opportunity for mobile species to colonise we may create something truly important though unexpected. Cite Mining Bees **15,16,17** and **18** Orchids at Kemerton Lake. **19.** However arrival of mobile species not always good. E.g. *Crassula helmsii* .

Local authorities have a direct role to play as managers of land. Commend Wychavon's scheme on Pershore Meadows and its Community Woodland at Stoulton.

When we come to my fourth strand - the maintenance of a general level of wildlife in the countryside - it becomes harder for the local authority to do much directly except in the management of its own estate. But it can do much there in its management of parks. – Leave uncut grass for invertebrates. Plant native trees and shrubs. Provide nectar sources etc.. What goes for Parks also goes for private gardens, which are potentially a huge nature conservation resource, over a million acres and LAs can help spread this message by example. They can also support partners in a wide range of activities e.g. Watch Groups, RSPB's Wildlife Explorers and Forest Schools. Indeed the County Council has a direct role in supporting nature education in schools. Celebration of local distinctiveness as shown by District's wildlife. Help with protection from invasives.

Weakness of present situation.

1. Member involvement depends on effectiveness of champion. Does not need to be expert but needs to be keen and persuasive.
2. Difficulties of inter authority collaboration produced by different structures. In some LA biodiversity sits in heritage under planning – in others in land management under parks.
3. Lack of appreciation by top tier of officers of obligations under NERC Act.
4. Lack of appreciation by political parties of degree of support for wildlife among voters. Compare PRSPB membership with political parties.
5. benefits for Biodiversity too –20 and it suffers first – Death Knell for Bluebells. 1991.

Nonetheless we have made huge strides in the last twenty years and it is my job to end on an upbeat note. The difference in Wychavon has been most marked, and I hope that this will be reflected in all the other Local Authorities in the Region. A good first step is for all West Midlands LAs to sign the Biodiversity Pledge.