

Alteration to Motion E: Protecting precious habitats in West Oxfordshire
Proposed by Cllr Arciszewska, seconded by Cllr Pearson – altered by the proposer Cllr Arciszewska*

Additional wording shown in red text:

This Council notes:

- The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world; with only about 50% of its biodiversity remaining, it ranks in the bottom 10% globally. It is therefore of utmost importance that the remaining areas of high ecological value are preserved, as they may serve as nucleation sites for the wider nature recovery.
- This is also a matter of urgency. The new Planning and Infrastructure Bill has been created to fast-track the delivery of the government's ambition to build 1.5 million homes by the end of this parliament. This bill allows developers to meet their environmental obligations by making payments to the Nature Restoration Fund to promote nature restoration elsewhere.
- Environmental organisations and campaigners are deeply concerned that this new strategy will encourage developers to damage the environment locally and simply 'make up for it miles away'. According to legal analysis of the legislation, more than 5,000 of England's most sensitive and rare natural habitats are at high risk.
- SSSIs are areas of exceptional ecological or geological value that have legal protection. Their designation is one of the most important tools available for protecting the UK's most valuable habitats and species. Designation and management of SSSIs is one of Natural England's key statutory duties, which the Agency seems to be failing to fulfil. The rate of SSSI designations has slowed dramatically in recent years; the average time it takes to designate sites is getting longer. According to experts familiar with the matter, it takes up to 10 years to obtain an SSSI status. Moreover, it now appears that the Agency has suspended processing further designations altogether.
- We have some sites with extraordinary habitats, such as floodplain meadows and ancient woodlands in West Oxfordshire. They require legal protection. The Council has a legal duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity, and one of our priorities is to "create a better environment for people and wildlife".
- Given the rapid pace of housing development and the current shortcomings of the Natural England watchdog, the Council should stand up for the local environment and demand answers and actions from the Agency.

The council resolves to:

- Ask the Leader of the Council to write to Tony Juniper, the head of Natural England, to ask:
 - a) Why the SSSI designation process has been suspended
 - b) When the SSSI designation will be reinstated
 - c) Request that Natural England adopt a temporary approach to commenting on planning applications, which takes into account available local environmental

evidence to protect the sites that would otherwise have been designated as SSSIs if the designation process worked as intended.

d) Request that Natural England use this approach until the backlog in the SSSI designation is cleared.

- Send a copy of the letter to Emma Reynolds MP, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra),

**Council Procedure Rule 14.8 Alteration of Motion:*

With the consent of the seconder, and the Council, signified without discussion, a Member may alter: -

- *a motion of which they have given notice; or*
- *a motion which they have moved without notice; or*
- *an amendment to a motion they have moved.*

Only alterations which could be made as an amendment to the motion may be made.