

Garden Community, West of Braintree

It is well known that many wildlife species in Britain are declining and this is a result of man's activities. However, there is an opportunity to help wildlife in the proposed new West of Braintree Garden Community. I attended the first exhibition on this proposal when it was held in Great Saling village hall earlier this year. At that event, I stated that I would like the opportunity to put forward ideas for including wildlife enhancement in this proposed Garden Community.

The North Essex Garden Communities Charter proposes "a generous amount of green space". Among other functions this green space is to be "a haven for wildlife", and "local nature reserves, ditches and ponds will be provided". These proposals are excellent and careful consideration needs to be given to their implementation.

Rayne Parish Council have been in discussion with Tarmac over the re-instatement of the proposed gravel pit at Broadfields Farm. Tarmac have agreed that the pit will not be infilled with inert waste as originally proposed. In their current planning application, an extensive wetland area will be created with shallow lakes, marshlands and islands. This will benefit wetland birds in particular but also a great deal of other wildlife such as dragonflies and aquatic plants. Carefully placed footpaths and bird hides with interpretation will allow local residents to appreciate and understand the wildlife on their doorstep. Public access and management of this area must be considered in the planning process for any garden community. It is very important that the built area does not encroach on the wetland area. A buffer zone needs to be included in the plan to ensure the wetland remains undisturbed. The current planning application for the gravel extraction has provision for re-instatement to a wetland area but has just one public footpath through the area. One public footpath is not sufficient, more public paths are needed to ensure there is sufficient access for the management of this area. It is very important that this area is given long term legal protection for its management and public access.

It is worrying that at the first exhibition I attended in Great Saling village hall there were three maps showing possible approximate layouts for the new community and one, which we were told at the time was the preferred option, showed housing on the site of the proposed gravel pit.

To benefit more than just birds It is important that the wetland area links to the existing woods and copses and to any newly proposed wildlife sites by way of a network of hedges. Most hedges on arable land are too thin to be of much benefit to wildlife so certain linking hedges should be selected to be improved. Extra planting will make wide dense hedges with grassy edges. The shrubs selected to be planted must include plants that benefit pollinators and ones that bear berries and nuts that will provide winter food for birds and small mammals.

Wildflower meadows would be a spectacular feature that would be sure to attract attention from the local residents and only require one annual cut and removal of the cuttings in the

way of management. They could be seeded with green hay from existing nature reserves, this ensures that genetically local species are grown, this is an important consideration. The interest created in the meadows could be the catalyst needed to set up a group of interested locals who would then take on responsibility for monitoring the wildlife areas and getting involved in the management.

Existing buildings and woodland on the site will have to have comprehensive bat surveys. Bats navigate by following linear features such as hedges so any bat roosts that are found will need to be linked to the network of good hedgerows enabling the bats to easily fly to the wetland and woodlands where they need to forage. It may be possible to provide extra bat roost sites to give bats more choice of roost positions.

It is extremely important that all lighting will be down-lighting so that the canopies of trees and the improved hedges are all in darkness.

The management of all these wildlife areas should be made the responsibility of a committee including representatives from the local communities. The future of all the wildlife areas must be legally protected.

Braintree District Council and Essex County Council have an opportunity here to set a shining example to the rest of Britain of how to build a new community and at the same time to provide some benefits for wildlife.

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