

Let Local Politicians hear your voice

What do you cherish in your local area? a local woodland, a spring flowering meadow? Would you know where to start if you heard it was under threat from development? Do you know you have an opportunity to persuade planners and decision makers to provide for wildlife where you live? The Sussex Wildlife Trust cares about all wildlife sites but as a charity we have limited resources. This means we cannot respond directly to every threat we hear about. Therefore, we are actively encouraging people to take action to protect their local environment.

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Your views are important to your local politicians. You have local knowledge and you are the people that will be most affected by changes to your local environment. Do not underestimate the weight your voice can carry.

It is important to realise that your local politicians can be valuable allies when you are raising concerns about potential development of your local wildlife sites. The following suggestions are simple to do by yourself but if you are concerned about the impact of a development why not talk to other people in the area. You may find other like minded people whom you can work with.

It is important to be aware that your local elected members do not have to act on your behalf, but they are more likely to help if you can articulate your concerns in a clear concise and consider way.

How you can influence your Local Council

Your council has a statutory obligation to biodiversity [NERC 2006](#). They also have duties in maintaining the quality of your local environment. In order to do this they draw up various plans and strategies such as the Community Strategy and Local Development Framework.

Councils also have a responsibility to involve local communities in such plans. Councillors are voted in at the time of local elections and effectively volunteer part time, while council officers hold full time employment.

The structure of your local council will vary depending on where you live ranging from town or district councils through to unitary authorities. To find out more about your local government and who your local councillors are visit www.councillors.gov.uk. If you do not have access to the internet you can find out who your local councillors are at your local library or by phoning your local councils electoral service department.

How can you gain the support of your local councillor?

You can seek to secure the support of your local councillor by either writing to them or by attending one of their monthly surgeries. When writing or meeting with your local councillor it is important to present as much information as possible to support your concerns.

It is the role of councillors to build links between the council and the community and represent the communities interest in council decisions.

What can your local councillor do for you?

Find out from your councillor about the committees that maybe relevant to your concerns. Ask them what is going to be discussed at the committee and find out if you can attend and view the discussions from the public gallery.

Talk to the case officer for the planning application they will be writing the report put before the elected members at the planning committee.

How do involve my local MP?

Your MP is your representative in the House of Commons. Contacting them by letter, email or visiting one of there surgeries can aid you in gaining there support for your concerns. MP's can help provide pressure for action, in addition they can influence decisions and gain publicity for a cause. You are most likely to get support from your MP if the site in question is of major importance and you have already raised the issue with your local authority. You can find out who is your local MP by telephoning the House of Commons public information service 020 7219 4272. All MPs can be reached in writing at House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.



What can your MP do for you?

Once you have made contact with your local MP and they are willing to support your concerns they may be able to help in a variety of ways.

- ◆ Write to government ministers to raise your concerns.
- ◆ Sign Early Day motions
- ◆ Raise issues during debates
- ◆ Table parliamentary questions
- ◆ Write a column in your local paper

How can I ensure my letter is effective?

The key tips to keeping your letter to a councillor or MP effective include

- ◆ Keep it short long letters are unlikely to be read in detail
- ◆ Use your own language you are more likely to express your concerns clear if you use you own language.
- ◆ Be polite and constructive in your letter. You are more likely to get a positive, helpful response. To build your correspondence with your MP and to show your appreciation for their response take time to send a acknowledgement email or letter thanking them for their time.
- ◆ Use local examples and policies were relevant to demonstrate your concerns.
- ◆ If you are writing about a specific site you may wish to invite them to visit the site.

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