

Minutes from the Public Meeting held on Friday 16th January 2026 at Breinton Village Hall.

In Attendance:

Members of the public: 45

Members of Breinton Parish Council: Cllr Hull, Cllr Morfett, Cllr Moraweicka, Clerk, Lisa Law, Ward Cllr C Taylor.

Speaker: Will Watson.

Cllr Hull thanked all the members of the public and stakeholders for attending the meeting.

Breinton Parish Council Biodiversity Action Plan Meeting.

Cllr Morfett introduced Breinton's proposed Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and highlighted the parish's valuable natural environment, current threats, and opportunities for community involvement.

Purpose of the Meeting

The main aims were to raise awareness of Breinton's natural assets, introduce key stakeholders, form a Biodiversity Action Plan working group, encourage volunteers, and outline future citizen science and conservation activities.

Stakeholders and Community Involvement

Local stakeholders include Breinton residents, local farms, Manor Fruit Farm, Sugwas Farm, conservation organisations such as the National Trust and Wildlife Trust, and local businesses. Visiting stakeholders include walkers, cyclists, anglers, swimmers, artists, photographers, and nature enthusiasts who regularly use the parish landscape.

Breinton's Natural Environment

Breinton was identified as an area of high ecological value within the Herefordshire Nature Recovery Strategy, with important priority habitats across the parish.

Key Threats to Biodiversity

Several major risks were highlighted:

- **Planned road and bridge infrastructure projects**
- **Urban expansion west of Hereford**
- **Climate change impacts on the River Wye valley**

- **Intensive farming practices affecting soil health, wildlife, and plant diversity**

Guest Speaker Will Watson Presentation.

Ecologist and guest speaker Will Watson explained why Breinton's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) is essential for protecting local wildlife and guiding future development. The plan supports legal duties under national environmental legislation, helps influence planning decisions, and encourages community involvement in safeguarding the parish's natural environment.

- Breinton was highlighted as having exceptional ecological value due to its geology, landscape and variety of habitats. Priority habitats identified include traditional orchards, ancient and mixed woodland, hedgerows, ponds and wetlands, and the River Wye and its cliffs.
- Traditional orchards were emphasised as a key feature of Breinton's heritage and biodiversity. These support a wide range of wildlife including birds, mammals, insects, fungi, lichens and pollinators. However, orchards are under threat nationally and locally from development, agricultural intensification and loss of traditional management practices.
- Woodlands and hedgerows were identified as vital wildlife corridors that provide shelter, food and breeding sites for many species. Significant historic losses of ancient woodland and hedgerows have reduced habitat connectivity, increasing the importance of protecting what remains.
- The River Wye was highlighted as one of Breinton's most important natural assets but also one of the most threatened. Major pressures include agricultural runoff, sewage pollution, phosphate enrichment, habitat degradation and climate change impacts. These factors contribute to declining water quality and biodiversity.
- Ponds and wetlands were shown to be highly valuable habitats despite widespread historic loss. Restoration projects in Breinton have already demonstrated positive results, including the return of protected species such as the Great Crested Newt.
- The presentation concluded by outlining practical actions residents can take to support the BAP. These include orchard restoration, pollinator-friendly planting, wildlife surveys, river monitoring, pond management, meadow creation, hedgerow surveys and tree planting. Community-led "citizen science" projects were strongly encouraged as a way to build local knowledge and protect Breinton's natural heritage.

There was a ten-minute break before the meeting continued.

Why there's urgency now

Speakers stressed that **time is short** to record and evidence Breinton's wildlife and priority habitats. **Phase 1** of the road works south of Hereford is already underway, **Phase 2 is expected within ~2 years**, and the overall scheme is talked about as completing by **2031**. The message: if the parish wants solid ecological evidence (rare/protected species, key habitats), it needs to be gathered **now**, not later.

Western Urban Expansion

A major concern is the plan for **around 10,000 new houses west of Hereford** (the "Western Urban Expansion"). People noted that as the **Local Plan** develops and site details become clearer, the likely environmental impacts will also become clearer—so the parish needs to be prepared.

Likely route and impacts (based on 2018 plans)

Because current detailed plans aren't available, the meeting referred to the **2018 proposed route** and suggested the council may use a similar corridor again because it would be cheaper and easier to deliver.

Key concerns raised:

- **Noise**: modelling suggested a **large increase in road noise along the Wye Valley**, with limited reduction in city noise.
- **Belmont Country Park**: potential route cutting through the historic parkland, and affecting the **river cliffs**, which were described as important for **bats, owls, and other protected species**.
- **Ancient woodland designation gaps**: a specific woodland area near the proposed crossing is **not recognised as ancient woodland in LNRS mapping**, and it was stated that correcting this would require **landowner permission and detailed ecological survey evidence**.
- **Landscape severance**: the road could cut through **Breinton Ridge**, with a major cutting, and potentially change/limit local access routes.
- **Wide "major adverse" impact zone**: maps were described as showing a **large proportion of the parish** affected by noise/pollution—bad for birds, bats, otters, badgers and wider biodiversity.

Stakeholder updates (what key landholders are already doing)

National Trust (Breinton Springs)

- Ongoing orchard and habitat management: replacement planting, reducing tree "sail effect" after storm losses, selective mistletoe management, retaining deadwood, scrub managed in a balanced way (not removing all), meadow management mainly by mowing (grazing difficult due to heavy dog use).

- Access improvements under consideration (e.g., gate/fence), but constrained by protections (Scheduled Monument consents).
- They said they haven't been directly consulted on the road proposals yet, but would want to be involved due to likely impacts.

Cider Museum Trust (orchards/landholding)

- They now own **substantial orchard land** and described the orchard collection as **nationally important** (working toward formal recognition/accreditation).
- They are building biodiversity evidence through regular visits (bird surveys, fungi work, etc.), collecting records into a database, and have a management plan signed off.
- They're exploring funding models (including biodiversity-related schemes) and longer-term partnerships and training opportunities.

Wildlife Trust

- Spoke about practical projects that could support Breinton: advice/funding for trees/orchards, orchard and deadwood training workshops, volunteer survey training, natural flood management work, and potential **Local Wildlife Site** designation work (surveying and management plans).
- They noted organisational leadership is new, so they didn't want to commit formally on the bypass position that night—but said it's a priority topic internally.

Next Steps and Community Action

The Parish Council encouraged residents to work with the council, landowners and stakeholders to help develop a more sustainable future. Proposed actions include:

- **Forming a dedicated Biodiversity Action Plan working group.** Encourage sign up for a volunteer group and/or working group.
- **Recording and monitoring local wildlife,** using tools like **iRecord** (take photos, submit sightings—no budget needed to begin).
- Aim for **at least 12 months** of surveying to capture seasonal species properly (and avoid “one-off winter surveys” missing key evidence).
- **Identifying priority conservation areas.** Clearing and restoring a neglected pond (“Drover’s Pond”) to improve habitat would be a suitable first project.
- **Organising walks, talks and volunteer activities**
- **Improve communications** via the local village Facebook/community channels and email updates.

Cllr Hull thanked Cllr Morfett for his work to date on the Biodiversity Action Plan. Cllr Hull also thanked all attendees for coming and encouraged those present to sign up either as volunteers or to join the Biodiversity Action Plan working group.

Meeting Ended at 21.10pm