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| **Biodiversity Policy** | St Mary's University logo |

## **Introduction to Biodiversity**

## Biodiversity is the contraction of the words ‘biological’ and ‘diversity’. It is a term used to define the variety and variability of all living things from bacteria and micro-organisms, through plants and animals, to you and me. The more varied and extensive biodiversity is in an ecosystem the more life it can support and the more resilient an ecosystem is to the challenges it faces. That biodiversity also requires dynamic balance in the ecosystem to ensure that each part can sustain itself and support the other parts.

## **Policy Objective**

## The aim of this policy is to highlight areas of good practice, to look for scope for improving those good practices, and to identify, make, and bring about new commitment to biodiversity within the University among the St Mary’s community including those living, studying, and working within it, regardless of duration.

## **Our sites**

The St Mary’s University site has two primary locations; The Waldegrave Road (Main) Campus and the Teddington Lock Sports Campus in Broom Road.

The **Main Campus** forms part of the remaining plot of Horace Walpole’s estate after it was broken up in the years following his death in 1797 whereupon his house and grounds changed ownership and eventually became what is now the main University campus. A part of the site including the oldest part of the building and surrounding grounds are leased to the Strawberry Hill Trust who restored Strawberry Hill House and manage a portion of the grounds.

In keeping with a historic location in a leafy and idyllic, but urban environment, the site is protected from inappropriate development by a Tree Preservation Order, Conservation Area status and Metropolitan Open Land designation. The grounds of the original estate including a portion of the University campus are designated as Historic Parks and Gardens. The protection afforded by these designations helps towards protecting the existing biodiversity. This policy aims to go further in committing to protecting and enhancing the biodiversity of the University grounds and gardens.

The **Teddington Lock Sports Campus** is the former Shell Sports Ground now used by St Mary’s students and the community. It lies within the local authority Thames Policy Area and borders neighbouring Conservation Areas.

## **Trees and plants**

The most recent University tree survey of 2020 includes 615 trees of 102 different varieties and species. Many are native mature parkland trees the bulk of which are subject to a Tree Preservation Order. When any require removal having died or become unsafe replacements are normally of the same species and replacement automatically undertaken as a requirement of planning consent for removal. There are some less desirable non-native species such as the invasive Ailanthus ‘altissima’ which, whilst there is no action to eradicate them, are usually replaced with more suitable species when the need arises as they either die or are removed for any other reason that requires it.

Whilst much of the University site is developed with trees and shrubs planted around the various buildings, many of the trees on site pre-date the development as a University campus. The ‘Walpole Oak’ in the perimeter woodland border of the leased and University managed property being the finest example. Additionally, and of note are the non-native but large mature Cedrus ‘libani’ in the rear garden, and Pinus ‘wallichiana’ in the front garden, of a University residential property at 13 Waldegrave Park which borders the campus and may once have formed part of the original Walpole estate.

**The University is committed to the ongoing and careful maintenance of all the trees on the campus with appropriate and professional work undertaken to any trees work is required to be undertaken on.**

For example, this may include work such as crown reduction where overextending growth risks failure of unions, a particular issue where some species of non-native trees exceed their usual growth rate due to the conditions of the environment, they are in. This care is not exclusively limited to pruning; braces in the upper limbs are also used to support overbearing weight on some trees to prolong their healthy life and avoid removing branches where it is appropriate to do so.

As many of the trees in much of the University campus are in areas of development suitable locations for uncleared areas of woodland under story are limited, however a section of woodland to the Eastern boundary of the campus bordering the Strawberry Vale footpath remains managed to a lesser extent where wildlife can flourish, and insects thrive in decaying wood piles left on the ground from dead wood that has been removed from the trees overhead.

**The University will continue to retain this habitat rich area of woodland in a reduced intervention manner whilst also carefully ensuring that any essential work undertaken in this area limits the impact and ideally enhances the biodiversity as a result.**

Shrubs and other plants at the University are equally as diverse in range with a mix of native and non-native species around the site. In addition, some areas that would usually in the past have been sown to grass or planted with low growing shrubs or a conifer border have been planted with strawberries, bluebells, snowdrops, and young fruit trees and bushes.

**The University Grounds Team intention will continue to look for appropriate locations and opportunities to undertake planting of this type during their routine activities. Selection of trees, plants, shrubs, herbs, bulbs, and any other planting will continue to be given consideration of how the diversity of species can be enhanced and thereby support the broader ecosystem on the University campus.**

## **Wildflower Meadows**

In 2012 following the construction of the new sports hall on an old redgra playing surface plans to alter the appearance of the newly opened vista into the campus from Waldegrave Road along the perimeter boundary to the west of the campus were made with the introduction of both a perennial and annual wildflower meadow. A planning alteration was required to address changes being made to the landscape plan of the new build and a commitment to the longer-term retention and proper maintenance of the meadows agreed to in doing so. As a result, the spring and summer of 2013 saw the first results of the new meadows; an incredible success for biodiversity on the campus and an attractive display through a prolonged period due to the seed mix which results in the flowering of new species as others end.

Once the perennial meadow had become established bulb planting were also introduced within the area to further increase the biodiversity.

In addition to the meadow areas on the western perimeter a section of steep banking leading down from the athletics track perimeter close to Graham halls of residence is also sown to perennial meadow.

**The University remains committed to the ongoing maintenance and retention of the meadows including the maintenance regime for the perennial meadow and re-sowing of the annual meadow each year. The University will also look at further enhancing them with additional planting of flowering bulbs where suitable.**

## **Green Roof**

The Green Roof is on the roof of the lower level flat roof of the new sports hall and link room. It has a variety of species within it that were new to the University campus when it was introduced. It saw new habitat and increased the biodiversity in a location that didn’t have much prior to the build which was on an old redgra playing surface. A specialist contractor manages the roof on behalf of the University and provides a report on its condition. A recent report stated, ‘The roof is a bio-diverse roof which looks to have been established from seed. There are several different sedum species spread across the roof, grasses and wild strawberries among other species. The sedums are now in flower making the roof visually attractive and popular with pollinators such as honeybees and bumble bees.

**The University is committed to continuing the professional management and upkeep of the green roof to ensure it continues to thrive.**

## **Wildlife**

The wildlife on the University campus is extensive for an urban environment and the habitat conducive to its survival. Bats and birds are catered for with bat and nesting boxes. Woodpeckers can be heard, and their work seen in the trees. Urban foxes have been seen raising their young on the lawn near the woodland. The Teddington Lock Sports Campus and its proximity to the river Thames with the insect rich feeding ground has bat’s flight paths through the site. Despite an often-busy campus the wildlife manages to thrive alongside staff and students.

**The University will continue to retain and avoid significant impact on the habitat of the wildlife on site enhancing it where possible. Bird boxes will be cleaned and maintained. Any litter that blights natural habitats and causes harm to wildlife will be cleared regularly as it arises.**

## **Herbicides/Pesticides**

The use of chemicals in the treatment of pests and weeds is undesirable but something that the University are unable to avoid in entirety given the mixed landscape of the University campus. They are mostly used for the control of weeds and moss on hard surfaces and the athletics track. As a result, the use of pesticides and herbicides are given careful consideration in relation to what, where, and when, any are used.

Occasional infestations of introduced pests which upset the natural balance of biodiversity such as box caterpillar and oak processionary moth or non-native invasive weed species such as Japanese knot weed are dealt with in accordance with best practice after careful consideration.

**The University is committed to best practice in undertaking treatments for pests and weeds but will limit treatments as far as is practically possible. The University grounds team and their contractors do not use neonicotinoids due to the long-term harmful nature of these to bees and are committed to this going forward.**

## **Watercourses/Ponds**

Whilst neither of the two primary University sites, (and none of the smaller ones with limited size gardens or external space), have watercourses or ponds of any type the proximity to the Thames means that occasionally wildlife drawn to waterways can be observed on either site.

## **Waste**

Litter is well managed on site and is also managed beyond the University boundary in local roads. Removing litter from the habitat of wildlife protects them and ensures they seek out suitable food sources reducing the scavenging of some species.

Green waste remains on site on the Waldegrave Road campus and where practicable is shredded back in the area it was created. Grass clippings are minimised with mowing taking place regularly enough to avoid the need for collection more than essential and any collected are spread out to dry and decompose with other green waste that can’t be shredded in situ. Where suitable shredded green waste or chipped wood waste is used as a mulch to support water retention around trees and shrubs.

The Sports Campus is primarily playing surfaces with some trees bordering the site and in isolated locations between pitches and has limited scope for retaining green waste on site. As a result, most green waste created in this location is disposed of to a waste contractor, but the effort is made to keep this clear of other contaminants as far as possible.

**The University is committed to keeping the campus and surrounding area clean and waste and litter free. The University remain committed to doing so through education and positive actions and expect all users to respect the environment and dispose of waste and litter appropriately.**

**The University will also look on an ongoing basis at how to reduce waste and litter, in particular the small plastics that contaminate and poison the wider environment.**

**The University will continue to avoid the disposal of green waste off site from the Waldegrave Road campus and retain, shred, chip, and compost it, as much as can be achieved.**

## **Biodiversity and Education**

The University prides itself on the students that leave the University, and many go on to become educators themselves taking up positions as teachers in schools across the nation. As a result, the University is in an excellent position to take education on environment, sustainability, and biodiversity to new generations at an early age. Within the Institute of Education at St Mary’s University undergraduate and postgraduate degrees leading to primary and secondary education teaching roles naturally have elements of ecology, sustainable development, and biodiversity included within course content to differing extents. This is a subject very important to many young people who are now more aware of, and passionate than ever about their environment, nature, and the health and biodiversity of the planet. As a result, there is a passion among those delivering course content to see a future where these subjects become formally embedded in the programs they teach.

**The University will continue to strive towards embedding biodiversity and the wider subject of sustainability, ecology, and global citizenship into the content of courses we teach enhancing the good work already taking place in degree courses, lectures and ultimately in the classrooms of young people our students go on to educate.**

Chris Paget

Director of Estates and Campus Services

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