



a million voices for nature

Lobbying your local council

When trying to protect the environment, your local politicians can be useful allies. Find out how to get your message across to them.

Some of the suggestions are simple to do by yourself; others would be more suited to a group of interested people. Why not talk to other people in your area and find like-minded individuals so that you can work together?

Influencing your local council

Your local council has a key role in maintaining the quality of your local environment. They must draw up various plans and strategies to help do this, such as the Community Strategy, Local Development Framework and Local Biodiversity Action Plan (see our PDFs *Getting involved in planning applications* and *How to get involved with local development plans*).

Councils also have a responsibility to involve local communities. Councillors are voted in at elections and effectively volunteer part-time, while council officers hold full-time paid positions, as council employees.

The structure of local government will vary depending on where you live. In England, there are six different types of council, ranging from town councils to unitary authorities. The Directgov website (www.direct.gov.uk) has more information about local government in your area, and who your local councillors are. If you do not have access to the internet, you can find out who your local councillors are by visiting your local library, or telephoning your local council's Electoral Services department. You'll also be able to find out any details of committees that are relevant to your concerns.

How to gain the support of your local councillor, and what they can do for you

To secure the help of your councillor, you can write to them or visit them at their local surgery. When doing this, provide them with as much information as you can to support your arguments.

Find out from a councillor, or council officers, what issues are likely to be discussed at the next relevant committee and go along. Arrange to meet the officer who will write the report for the council committee so that you can discuss with them your concerns.

It is the role of councillors to develop links with the community and represent that community's interests in the council. They may also be able to represent the interests of other organisations, such as businesses.

Involving your MP

Your MP is your representative in the House of Commons. Contacting them, by writing a letter or visiting their advice surgery, to gain their support for an issue can be very useful. They can help provide pressure for action, influence decisions and gain publicity for an issue.

Your MP might have a blog or a column in your local newspaper. Securing your MP's support may lead to their giving your issue local coverage. They can:

- write to Government Ministers to raise your concerns
- sign an Early Day Motion
- raise issues during debates
- table parliamentary questions.

You can find out who your MP is by telephoning the House of Commons Public Information Office on 020 7219 4272, or by visiting the Find your MP website (findyourmp.parliament.uk/). All MPs can also be reached in writing at House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA.

Tips on making your letter effective

- Keep it short, as very long letters are less likely to be read.
- Be polite. The response you get is likely to be more positive and helpful if your approach is a constructive one. If you have time, thank your MP for their reply as this will help to build a better relationship with them.
- Use your own words. You are more likely to make an impact on your MP if you express the points in your own words. If possible, give an example from your local area supporting the points you have made. If you do not know of an example, do not worry – your letter will still have an impact.
- If you are writing about a specific site, you may wish to offer them the opportunity to visit it.

Take campaigning a step further

We run regular campaigns that target MPs, MEPs and others on a wide-range of issues.

By getting involved in these campaigns and using a mixture of social media, writing letters and emails, as well as meeting with decision makers directly, you can make a huge difference.

Become an RSPB Campaign Champion, and you could be helping to improve the laws and policies that directly affect your local area.

You don't need previous campaign experience as we'll send you all the necessary background information, and explain the issues and key points.

For more information and a registration form, visit our website (www.rspb.org.uk/campaignchampions) or phone 01767 680551 and ask for the Parliamentary Campaigns Team.