HIGHCLIFFE AND WALKFORD NATURE VILLAGE

Report to Full Council – September 2026

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1. Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to enable Full Council to consider the progress made since its decision in June 2026 and to make the decisions necessary to progress the proposed Highcliffe and Walkford Nature Village initiative.

In June 2026, Council:

(a) noted the contents of the report;

(b) agreed to support the Nature Village designation in principle, subject to a final decision at a later date; and

(c) authorised the Chair and Vice Chair to continue discussions with BCP Council and other parties to progress the Nature Village designation and strategy, with a proposal to return to Council for a final decision by autumn 2026.

This report therefore focuses on the immediate decisions required at this stage. It does not seek to pre-empt decisions on the detailed Nature Village programme or on individual future projects which have not yet been considered by Full Council.

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2. Background

Highcliffe and Walkford has a rich natural environment, including green spaces, nature reserves and coastal habitats. These areas support wildlife, health, wellbeing and community life and contribute significantly to the identity of the parish.

The proposed Nature Village initiative is intended to:

- highlight and celebrate the natural environment of Highcliffe and Walkford;
- encourage nature protection and recovery;
- promote sustainability and awareness of local wildlife;
- encourage residents, community organisations, schools and other groups to participate in nature-related activities; and
- provide a framework within which community-led projects and activities can be developed.

In 2025, BCP became the first place to receive official Nature Towns accreditation. The proposed Highcliffe and Walkford designation would sit within, but remain separate from, that wider initiative.

The proposed Nature Village designation has no statutory or legal status. It would be a voluntary initiative adopted by the Parish Council.

The initiative would also seek to operate consistently with BCP Council's Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which identifies priority habitats and opportunities for nature recovery across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

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3. Progress since the June decision

Following the June decision, discussions have taken place concerning the proposed designation and the potential development of a Nature Village programme.

The September report identifies a number of potential activities which could form part of such a programme, including:

- bird boxes, bat boxes and insect/bee hotels;
- interpretation and information boards;
- Nature Village signage and branding;
- a parish nature information pamphlet;
- talks, walks and conservation projects;
- initiatives encouraging residents to improve biodiversity in their own gardens;
- nature-related health and wellbeing activities;
- arts and photography competitions;
- guided walks and talks;
- children's nature activities;
- eco-garden and shop-window competitions;
- window-box schemes;
- litter-picking;
- species surveys; and
- other activities proposed by residents, community groups and organisations.

These remain potential activities rather than a programme formally approved by Full Council.

A number of local and external organisations have been identified as potential participants or partners, including community organisations, schools, businesses, churches, environmental organisations and BCP Council services.

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4. Nature Village designation

The June resolution requires a final Council decision on the proposed designation.

The proposed designation is intended to provide a framework and identity for community activity relating to nature, biodiversity, conservation and environmental awareness within Highcliffe and Walkford.

It is proposed that the designation should be presented as a Parish Council initiative, working with BCP Council and other partners where appropriate.

Before the designation is formally adopted, Council should be satisfied as to:

- the nature and status of the designation;
- the relationship with BCP Council's Nature Towns initiative;
- the relationship with BCP's Local Nature Recovery Strategy;
- the role of BCP Council and its countryside team;
- the arrangements for any launch or public announcement; and
- the proposed use of Nature Village branding and associated communications.

Recommendation

Council is asked to:

1. Agree to formally support the designation of Highcliffe and Walkford as a Nature Village, subject to the arrangements set out in this report.

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5. Nature Village strategy

The June resolution specifically referred to progressing both the designation and strategy.

The range of potential projects identified to date demonstrates the considerable scope of the proposed initiative. However, a detailed strategy has not yet been presented to Full Council.

It is considered important that the Council agrees a strategic framework before committing itself to a substantial programme of activities or long-term expenditure.

The strategy should provide, as a minimum:

- an overall vision for the Nature Village;
- guiding principles;
- clear objectives and goals;
- defined priorities;
- the scope of the programme;
- proposed roles and responsibilities;
- arrangements for working with community groups and external organisations;
- financial principles;
- proposed measures of success;
- reporting arrangements; and
- a roadmap for the development of the programme.

The strategy will provide the framework against which individual projects and expenditure can subsequently be considered.

It is therefore proposed that the strategy be brought to the next Full Council meeting for consideration and approval.

Recommendation

Council is asked to:

2. Note that a draft strategy will be brought to the October 2026 meeting of Full Council.

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6. Working Group

Given the breadth of the proposed initiative, it is recommended that a Parish Council working group is established to assist with the development of the strategy and future programme.

The working group should initially comprise a majority of Parish Councillors, together with such officers, advisers or representatives of external organisations as may be invited to contribute when appropriate.

The working group's role should be to:

- assist in developing the Nature Village strategy;
- identify and prioritise potential projects;
- engage with community organisations and potential partners;
- consider proposals for future activities;
- develop recommendations for Full Council;
- assist in preparing the proposed Festival of Nature, if Council subsequently agrees that it should proceed; and
- monitor progress against decisions made by Full Council.

The working group should not have authority to commit the Council to expenditure or make decisions reserved to Full Council unless specifically authorised to do so.

The working group should report regularly to Full Council, with monthly reporting proposed during the initial development phase.

Recommendation

Council is asked to:

3. Establish a Nature Village Working Group and agree its membership and reporting arrangements.

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7. Festival of Nature

A Festival of Nature has been identified as a potential major component of the Nature Village programme.

The current proposal envisages an annual Festival of Nature bringing together a range of nature, environmental, educational and community activities.

Potential activities associated with a festival could include talks, guided walks, demonstrations, children's activities, exhibitions, community projects and other events delivered by local organisations.

A presentation on the Festival proposal will be made to Full Council, accompanied by sufficient written information to allow members to understand the proposal and provide comments.

Members should have the opportunity to provide views on:

- the purpose and scope of the proposed Festival;

- the potential benefits to the community;
- the proposed timing;
- potential venues;
- participation by community organisations, schools and businesses;
- anticipated costs;
- potential funding sources;
- event management arrangements; and
- the role of any external event coordinator.

Member feedback will then be incorporated into a revised proposal for consideration at the October meeting.

Recommendation

Council is asked to:

4. Note the presentation on the proposed Festival of Nature and invite members to submit comments and suggestions for consideration in the development of a final proposal for the October 2026 meeting.

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8. Festival timing

The current proposal identifies late May as the preferred timing for the Festival, with March identified as an alternative. Pros and cons:

March

Potential advantages include:

- allowing nature-related preparation activities to take place earlier in the year;
- avoiding some potential clashes with established summer events;
- allowing certain biodiversity activities to be undertaken before the main nesting period.

Potential disadvantages include the greater risk of adverse weather and potentially reduced participation in outdoor activities.

May

Potential advantages include:

- generally more favourable weather;

- the possibility of using the school half-term to increase family participation.

Potential disadvantages include:

- school holidays and examinations;
- potential pressure on venues, businesses and other local stakeholders;
- proximity to other major local events;
- additional spending could be budgeted within the 27/28 budget setting process

The timing of the Festival should therefore be considered.

Recommendation

Council is asked to:

5. Agree in principal a festival date.

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9. Event coordinator

Discussions have taken place with Suzy Wheeler of Strawberry Fields concerning the potential organisation of a Festival of Nature.

Strawberry Fields has indicated an interest in working with the Parish Council on the development of the event.

However, no appointment or commitment to engage an external event coordinator has yet been made and Council will need to consider:

- the Festival proposal;
- the proposed scope of the coordinator's role;
- the proposed fee or other financial commitment;
- procurement and appointment arrangements;
- reporting and accountability;
- who will approve decisions made during the event-planning process; and
- the relationship between the coordinator, the Working Group and Full Council.

A final proposal should therefore be brought to the October meeting.

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10. Financial implications

The proposal suggests an initial Nature Village budget of £25,000 spread across the 2026/27 and 2027/28 financial years.

However, the potential programme is still being developed and a detailed strategy and costed programme will need to be approved.

A detailed financial proposal will be prepared once the strategy and priority projects have been developed.

This will identify, for each proposed activity:

- estimated cost;
- proposed funding source;
- whether expenditure is one-off or recurring;
- proposed financial year;
- any ongoing financial commitment.

This approach will allow Council to determine the appropriate level of funding based on an agreed programme rather than approving a broad budget before the scope of the programme has been established.

Recommendation

Council is asked to:

6. Note the financial implications and defer consideration of any additional Nature Village budget until a strategy and costed programme of activities are brought before Council.

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11. Governance and Council control

The Nature Village initiative is intended to be a Parish Council-led project delivered in partnership with the wider community.

The involvement of community organisations, residents, schools, businesses and environmental organisations will be important to its success.

However, the Parish Council should retain appropriate oversight of:

- the strategic direction of the programme;
- expenditure;
- commitments made in the Council's name;

- the use of Nature Village branding;
- engagement of contractors or external organisations;
- major events;
- long-term commitments; and
- changes to the agreed scope of the programme.

The Working Group will therefore develop proposals and make recommendations to Full Council, rather than determine the overall programme independently.

This will ensure that all members have an opportunity to contribute to the development of the initiative and that major decisions remain matters for the Council.

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12. Proposed next steps

Subject to the decisions of Full Council in September, the proposed sequence is:

September 2026

- final decision on Nature Village designation;
- establish the Working Group;
- receive the Festival presentation;
- invite member comments on the Festival;
- begin development of the detailed strategy.

October 2026

- consider and approve the Nature Village strategy;
- consider the final Festival of Nature proposal;
- consider the proposal for engagement of an event coordinator;
- agree appropriate financial arrangements;
- agree management, decision-making and reporting arrangements.

Thereafter

Subject to Council approval, the Working Group would oversee the development of agreed projects and report regularly to Full Council.

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13. Recommendations to Council

Council is asked to:

1. Agree to formally support the designation of Highcliffe and Walkford as a Nature Village, subject to the arrangements set out in this report.

2. Note that a detailed Nature Village strategy has not yet been presented and require a draft strategy to be brought to the October 2026 meeting of Full Council.

3. Establish a Nature Village Working Group and agree that its membership, and reporting arrangements.

4. Note the presentation on the proposed Festival of Nature and invite members to submit comments and suggestions for consideration in the development of a final proposal for the October 2026 meeting.

5. Agree in principal a festival date.

5. Note the financial implications and defer consideration of any additional Nature Village budget until a strategy and costed programme of activities are brought before Council.

6. Agree that no final decision on the engagement of an external event coordinator is made until the final proposals are brought before Full Council in October.

7. Require the Nature Village Working Group to report regularly to Full Council on progress and to bring forward recommendations for consideration and decision as appropriate.