

## **Bees in Putney – What we can do to help them.**

### **Background:**

#### **Bees**

There are 250 different bee species in the UK of which almost 90% have been recorded within the borough. As an example, Wandsworth Common alone is home to 56 different bee species (I do not have up to date figures for Wimbledon or Putney Commons). Bees have very specific requirements in terms of habitat – for example moisture content of soil and the availability of nearby food sources. The Council endeavours to ensure that the Borough's parks and commons, together with other open spaces, continue to provide the sort of habitats that encourage biodiversity, including in relation to bees.

#### **Honey Bees**

Concern has been raised nationally about a decline in honey bee numbers, however the British Beekeepers Association reports that the number of hives increased from an estimated 40,000 in 2007 to more than 80,000, in 2010; with the number of honey bees rising from 23 billion to 48 billion. Unexplained losses in honey bee colonies can be attributed to disease, and poor nutrition due to habitat loss although this is still the focus of much research. Certainly in the south-east the honey bee is faring much better than other parts of the country and this may well be down to the relatively high proportion of gardens and the diversity of plants within them. Recent research shows that there are over three million gardens in Greater London – 3,267,174 to be precise. That's an area of 37,942.09 hectares full of bee-friendly flowering plants and shrubs.

#### **Putney Park Lane.**

Putney Park Lane is first recorded in 1273-4 as a footpath across the parkland to access a church. By 1748 it is depicted on maps as a tree lined avenue. Whilst other parts of the "park" were formalised through time, the avenue retained its informal parkland nature and has survived to this day as an unmade tree lined road. A Historical Landscape Management Plan completed in the late 1990's expressly recommends that no additional shrub planting is appropriate as this would alter the character of the Lane.

#### **Providing for Bees:**

We can see that as a borough, most of our bee species are in good health and have stable populations already, using existing habitats; we do not have specific population decline issues to remedy. Having spoken to beekeepers it is apparent that bees regularly travel up to 3 miles for the best food & nectar sources and they do not (unlike for example bats) need to follow a well stocked linear route to get there. I think the concept of a bee line is therefore slightly flawed and a more general approach will reap greater rewards. I agree with the suggestion from the Putney Society that the best way to focus effort in the Putney area is therefore to promote wildlife friendly gardening amongst local residents. There are many resources available both published and on-line which give advice on appropriate planting and management and I would be happy to provide more information on this approach should that be helpful.