

Dark Skies Policy for Freshford

Why does light pollution matter?

Efficient and environmentally sensitive lighting benefits wildlife, lessens harmful effects on human health, saves energy and money, slows climate change, means better safety and security and enhances our view of the inspiring night sky.

Light has been identified as a source of pollution by the Government and Chief Medical Officer, and has multiple negative impacts:

Biodiversity

- Light alters the behaviour of nocturnal wildlife including bats, owls and insects (30% of all vertebrates and 60% of invertebrate are nocturnal).

Human health

- Light pollution affects our circadian rhythms, disturbing sleep and development.
- Artificial light disrupts melatonin production which can lead to suppression of the immune system, increased risk of disease, mood instability and increased risk of mental illness.
- Poorly designed and/or installed outdoor lighting can be a nuisance to neighbours and a hazard to motorists, cyclists and pedestrians.
- Light pollution hides the universe from curious minds.

Climate

- Unnecessary use of energy and resources drives climate change.

Financial

- Inappropriate lighting wastes money.

Why does it matter in Freshford?

All of the above apply in general to Freshford but there are also specific issues relevant to our village:

- Freshford Parish Council have declared a climate and nature emergency, as have BANES whose guidance states:
Development will be expected to retain or improve the darkness of rivers, watercourses or other ecological corridors in particular to protect or provide a functional dark route for European protected species... lighting must be designed in relation to the protection of wildlife habitats.
- Rare bats: the Frome and Avon river valleys are home to multiple rare and protected bat species including the rare Greater Horseshoe bat. It has been shown that inappropriate lighting disturbs both roosting and feeding patterns and is a driver of bat population decline. It is an offence to injure, disturb or kill bats, or destroy or alter their habitats.
- AONB: light pollution of the night sky is an increasing intrusion into the countryside at night; with ever increasing levels of new housing in the AONB, light pollution is likely to get worse unless action is taken to address this issue. Poorly designed street lighting and insensitively used security and decorative lighting cause sky glow and an absence of darkness. Light pollution affects all of the village, causing light trespass and loss of visual amenity even across the valley.

How can light pollution be minimised?

Light pollution is easily fixed and everyone can benefit. The following guidelines can be used by individuals and will be applied by the Parish Council when assessing and commenting on planning applications:

1. Challenge the need for lighting – is it really necessary?
2. Use lighting only where it is needed; directing lights downward and using shields/baffles can eliminate polluting up-light
3. Consider interior lighting as well as external: use shutters/shades to stop light spilling out
4. Use timers and movement-activated sensors where possible
5. Use warm lighting hues (restrict exterior lighting to warm white to amber, 2,700 kelvin or below; blue/cold light is more harmful to ecosystems and human health)
6. Limit brightness (lumen levels), avoid glare/dazzle
7. Actively manage; install effective controls and review and improve in line with latest best practice.

What is the parish council doing?

- Streetlights
The PC has consulted with the community about turning off some of Freshford's street lights, to reduce light pollution and save money and energy. A trial period with the selected lights switched off is planned for Autumn/Winter 2024.
- Planning policy
Those seeking planning permission must be asked to demonstrate they have considered where any external light shines, when it shines, how much it shines, lighting types and any possible ecological impact. These issues can then be considered by the council as part of the planning application. Guidelines now dictate retaining or improving ecosystems not just limiting harm.
- Raising awareness
About what we can all do to minimise light pollution and why this is important; raising the profile of dark skies and how this is an environmental asset that is often not considered but one we are increasingly at risk of losing; working to be part of a broad area which could form a 'dark sky protection zone' in the future.

References

BANES Guidance (See D8) <https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/local-plan-core-strategy-and-placemaking-plan-partial-update/minor-amendments>

Cotswolds AONB dark skies policy: <https://www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Cotswolds-Dark-Skies-Artificial-Light-Position-Statement.pdf>

CPRE map of light pollution: <https://www.cpre.org.uk/light-pollution-dark-skies-map/>

Starlit Skies for Bath: <https://starlitskies.org.uk/about/>