

## **TRAFFIC, ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY PANEL**

Minutes of the meeting of the Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel held on Tuesday, 16 November 2021 at 4pm in the Guildhall.

### **Present**

Councillor Lee Mason (Chair)  
Matthew Atkins  
Stuart Brown  
Charlotte Gerada  
Jo Hooper  
Leo Madden

- 25. Apologies for Absence. (AI 1)**  
There were no apologies for absence.
- 26. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)**  
No interests were declared.
- 27. Minutes of the Previous Meeting (AI 3)**

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 February 2020 were agreed.**

- 28. Review into Accessibility of Transport Network - Update and Agreement on Next Steps (AI 4)**  
Charlotte Smith, Assistant Director, Corporate Services presented the report.

The panel discussed the next steps for this review and agreed that it was important to progress this review as much as possible before the next municipal year.

Members requested that further questions be included in the survey regarding wheelchair users' experience of using buses and trains:

- The width of bus's doors.
- Access to the wheelchair area on the bus.
- The ability of buses to dip down so that the ramp can be deployed.
- The provision of ramps at stations and the availability of staff to put them in place.

### Action

Information on bus companies' policies regarding wheelchair users and people with pushchairs and prams using the same space on the bus will be sent to members.

### **RESOLVED that:**

- **The quantitative survey will go live in November and run for six weeks, as per the timelines already discussed.**

- **Market research and transport will investigate options/ timescales for the analysis of the quantitative data (approx. 30 days work) and the preparation of a report for the panel.**
- **Qualitative elements of the research will be postponed until the next municipal year.**

## **29. Biodiversity Enhancement in Urban Portsmouth (AI 5)**

The scoping document for this review that was sent out with the agenda was agreed.

The Chair read out views on this topic that had been sent in from other Councillors:

### *Councillor Cal Corkery*

Across the council estates in Charles Dickens ward there are lots of great examples of greening initiatives which promote biodiversity and tackle the climate and nature crises. Often these projects are led and maintained by the residents themselves resulting in a more locally rooted initiative with strong community buy in. For example the Cornwallis Crescent community orchard and the Australia Close community garden. These kind of projects should be supported and expanded where possible.

One issue I would flag up in relation to the promotion of resident led greening and biodiversity in council blocks and estates is that it is not always clear what residents are allowed to do and different advice seems to be given in different areas. I believe it would be useful to have clear and consistent guidance available to council tenants and leaseholders about exactly what they can do on their balconies and in other shared areas.

### *Councillor Robert New*

The Hilsea Lines and north portsea sea defences is home to some of the city's finest bio-diversity and habitats from the tall trees of foxes forest to the rushes and coastal habitats. Copnor also is home to unique soft marsh-like settings and hidden lakes, providing further large green spaces. College Park contains many bee-friendly plantings and is a much loved green space on the east side of the city, along with other large green spaces in nearby Baffins.

The new linear park that Penny Mordaunt MP secured funding for will be the biggest linear park of its kind and will further enhance, protect and connect our communities with the natural world. The opportunities to enhance our biodiversity with this project has huge potential, scope and scale If Portsmouth City Council gets it right. It is my hope that they will consult with all members throughout the project life: from the current proposals to boots on the ground.

### *Councillor Terry Norton*

"Biodiversity is one of the most precious and important things we have. In Portsmouth we tend to think of it as something that's just nice to look at, and enjoy spending time in, but it's so much more. Nature means a lot to the residents of Drayton and Farlington (the greenest ward in the city with 1.8 trees per resident) for us it provides more than scenery. Our community value

the natural ecosystems around us and encourage the development of Biodiverse practices. One area of interest for the ward is bees who are vital to bio diversity. There are 130,000 plants for example for which bees are essential to pollination. We therefore support the inclusion of wildflower meadows within our community. A resident recently stated "Bees are more important than poultry in terms of human nutrition" an interesting point"

*Councillor Hannah Hockaday*

The view of Portsdown Hill whilst great hides a far more important gem. The unique conditions are why much of it is SSSI, with the mixed habitat providing a home for many lifeforms. It highlights how bio-diverse our wonderful city is, the carefully managed environment and mix of uses ensure a wide range of environments and therefore species. If it was all left to turn to gorse or forest this unique environment that has developed since humans first inhabited the land would be lost. The immense greenery from our parks and tree lined roads provide a home to a range of insects which in turn feed a range of birds that will delight the ornithologist. Coastal landscape provide yet more sea life that need the range of conditions to survive and thrive, and in turn maintains a food chain leading up to the seals that we see sunbathing on the mud flats of Langstone Harbour.

Cosham has an abundance of nature for residents to enjoy such as forest walks close by at Foxes forest / Hilsea Lines, a variety of stunning habitats at Farlington Marshes, and local parks providing not only green space for exercisers, dog walkers and children. The ponds beneath the chalk cliffs are a rare home for protected newts. A great environment around Lakeside with the marshier environment encouraging more life. Green areas have been enhanced in Cosham and around the city with the planting of wildflowers, and cherry trees in Cosham Park which help the pollinators and bees that humanity wouldn't survive without. These aspects are not only important for nature to thrive but for people to appreciate in the surrounding area of their homes. They also provide a vital soak away to reduce the prevalence of flooding and any loss of the green environment that is so vital impacts that and creates further risk of flooding of homes.

In response to questions from the panel, Vincent Mount, Team Leader Landscape Architect gave his views on the council's approach to improving biodiversity in the city:

There are numerous initiatives being carried out and bioersity is at the forefront of many people's minds.

The landscaping team works very well with the Green & Clean Team within Housing Department and the Parks Team in many areas. The teams are very energetic and positive to requests from local people for greening projects.

Prior to development or greening of any area it is essential that an assessment be carried out to consider:

- The needs of the location.
- The needs of the people and how they behave there.

- The possible negative impacts of the proposed measures on the existing ecology.
- The unique conditions and needs of the area and any mitigation measures that would be required.
- The size, aspect, wind conditions, sun exposure.
- The objective of the proposal.

Expectations must be managed from the start to avoid disappointment. For example, If more biodiversity were to be introduced on Southsea Common, it could change the character of the Common, and sometimes naturalised areas look quite messy, so this may not be desirable.

Native hedges, scrubland, woodland and wildflowers are not appropriate for all sites. They often need space to mature or fill out.

Many schools are already looking at greening their grounds and the council is working with the Tree Council to supply trees.

Portsmouth is very fortunate to have large areas of green spaces, some of which are naturalised or are already protected areas of nature conservation, eg. Hilsea Lines and Portsdown Hill.

The panel may wish to consider teasing out the difference between an area maintained to encourage biodiversity and areas that become neglected in this review. They can become areas where rubbish is dumped, or where it feels very overgrown and even unsafe in some instances.

Rewilded sites need regular monitoring and maintenance to make sure they are not becoming neglected or unsafe.

Sometimes there are simple steps to improving biodiversity e.g., mowing grass less often or leaving the verges uncut.

Some areas can thrive from human interaction, for example Eastney beach where the shingle vegetation is trampled or battered by people walking on/through it.

Before sea defence work started at Hilsea Lines the importance of the area was investigated and how any impact on the ecosystem could be mitigated.

To meet the council's objectives regarding rewilding and improving biodiversity, more could be done to encourage departments and Colas to work together, in order to provide a more cohesive approach to biodiversity and greening.

Wildflowers thrive in poor soil but need regular maintenance including cutting back at least once a year and the removal of other plants such as pernicious weeds (brambles, thistles). They may also need to be overseeded after the first year if the take-up is poor, and they become overly dominated by the more competitive species in the mix.

The landscape architect team training includes identifying biodiversity opportunities and objectives in the planning stages of a project. This is brought up by the client or the architects at a very early stage of projects.

Streets in Portsmouth are underdeveloped in terms of biodiversity. There is one town in Germany, Freiburg, where many of the streets have trees in parking pays. It makes a huge green impact, but is part of a much wider greening ethos. Most of the streets are wider than in Portsmouth, but not all of them.

Grass areas used for parking are not always the most effective because it is difficult for plants to grow through if they are heavily used or compacted. However, they can have a good effect on sustainable drainage because rainwater can penetrate its permeable surface and not run straight off into the drains.

The council's Greening Strategy incorporates many different themes on what can be done in parks, streets and gardens etc. This was drafted two years ago and provides an overview for what is possible. However the council is mostly reactive at the moment to requests for rewilding/ greening of areas and does not have a clear overarching vision with regard to improving biodiversity.

As shown in the Greening Strategy, there are many means to improve biodiversity e.g. introducing/ encouraging hedgerows, scrubland and woodlands. Fruit orchards have proved popular. These may not attract the most wildlife but encourage people to connect to nature, which is just as valuable.

Some plants (shrubs and perennials) are not native but are good pollinators so can still have value to bees and insects.

On some sites the opportunities may be rather restricted but it's about exploring the opportunities for biodiversity. For example at King George V playing fields proposals include artificial grass pitches and a new pavilion. There are many mature trees around the edge and some bats roost in the building but currently the biodiversity is rather low. This can be improved by some wildflower planting on soil mounds that use the excavated soil. The site is mainly used as playing fields so the uses/needs must be balanced out.

The council cares very well for its green, open spaces. There is room for improvement, but the Parks team and Green & Clean do a good job in trying new methods to improve biodiversity. Even Colas have been trialling wildflower areas. But it would be good to capture this all together and be working better towards a collective vision rather than working in silos.

In the subsequent discussion, Councillors raised the following points:

Clear parameters are required to ensure that rewilded areas and neglected areas can be distinguished.

Thorough assessments at the planning stage are essential to prevent unintentional consequences on the local ecosystem. In Cornwall cattle were

removed from an area to make it a more diverse environment. Unfortunately, this led to choughs leaving as they rely on the manure.

It is important that the council and Colas are clear regarding wilding projects and also the spraying of weedkiller which is sprayed on pavements and the walls of forecourts.

The review must be strategic in its approach.

The other 35 Councillors have been invited to submit their views about this review.

Rewilding is not always the best option to improve biodiversity.

It may be useful to identify the common themes where the council can work in a consistent way city-wide.

The proposal for a parking space to be converted into a parklet in Southsea has been supported by local businesses.

Although planting trees in streets is a great long-term objective, streets tend to be narrow and people want to be able to park near home.

## **ACTIONS**

The following meeting dates were agreed:

30 November

14 December

11 January

25 January

8 February.

Site visits to the following locations be arranged:

- Portsdown Hill
- Farlington Marshes
- Eastney Beach
- Tipner
- Milton Common

The meeting concluded at 6:20pm.