

TRAFFIC, ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel held on Tuesday 14 December 2021 at 4pm in the Guildhall.

Present

Councillor Lee Mason (in the Chair)
Matthew Atkins
Stuart Brown
Charlotte Gerada
Leo Madden

34. Apologies for Absence. (AI 1)

Councillor Hannah Hockaday sent her apologies as did her standing deputies.

35. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

No interests were declared.

36. Minutes of the Previous Meeting. (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

37. Review into biodiversity enhancement in urban Portsmouth. (AI 4)

The Chair read out the views that Ms Mathilde Chanvin had sent in for consideration for this review (these are attached to the minutes as appendix A).

Councillor Lynne Stagg, Cabinet Member for Traffic & Transportation explained that:

There is a clear distinction between biodiversity and greening. Both are important but greening an area does not automatically lead to increased biodiversity. To increase biodiversity, the right conditions need to be created including ensuring that the soil is appropriate for the chosen plants.

She does not think the council does enough to create ecosystems.

She has requested that a continuous wildflower verge be created from the roundabout near Farlington Marshes to Milton. This could be created when the works to improve the shared pedestrian and cyclists path has been completed. As part of this work to make the path safer, a hedge will be removed and in mitigation, a green fence will be erected in its place and more trees planted on the other side of the road.

As old bus shelters are taken down, they will be replaced with new ones with green rooves as part of a rolling programme. The first ones will be installed in London Road. This is part of a rolling programme that will see bus shelters with green roofs installed all over the city.

In low traffic neighbourhoods, planters are used rather than bollards. The intention is to install planters in as many roads as possible.

When allotment plots are given up and tyres used as planters left, she asked that these be given to her to use as planters elsewhere.

The Sikh community recently planted hundreds of trees on the roundabout near Farlington Marshes.

She would like to see more trees along roads, but the maintenance cost is up to £5,000 per tree. Underground services cables and any possible nuisance from fallen leaves must also be considered.

Weeds between paving stones along paths can be a trip hazard. The council is using less pesticides

Rewilding generally is a great thing. In allotments, careful management is essential to prevent problems for neighbouring plots.

A new ecosystem could possibly be created in the road verge in the middle of the M27 near the port. It would require very little maintenance.

The large shadow that the new university building that will be built next to Victoria Park is a concern. Perhaps a woodland ecosystem could be created there that would thrive in the shade.

In response to questions, she further explained that:

It is important that the type of trees and their possible maximum height is considered before planting trees in residential roads to ensure that they do not block daylight.

Planting the right plants, shrubs and trees for the right soil is essential so that they will thrive. Work needs to be done with the Planning Department to ensure the Local Plan clearly stipulates this.

In Sydney, Australia there was a multistorey carpark with many plants hanging off the edges with a self-watering system. It was very attractive and absorbed lots of particulates.

Parklets can bring lots of benefits to an area including increasing biodiversity and providing people with a green space to relax in. However, they can be very expensive.

In Iceland, all pupils take part in the weeding of the verges near their schools. Getting young children between 5 and 7 involved in planting is essential to spark a lifelong passion.

Green fences have wires to support the climbing plants and the one that will be erected on Eastern Road will help reduce the traffic noise for the residents

at the caravan site. It will also give oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide and particulates.

She did not know if young trees also absorb benzine.

The Clean Air Zone only tackles nitrogen dioxide levels not carbon dioxide levels.

An interesting documentary called The Air We Breathe conducted an experiment where a busy road in Birmingham was closed for 24 hours and trees were brought in planters all along the road. Carbon dioxide levels reduced by approximately 58% and the trees had absorbed a significant quantity of particulates.

During the discussion that followed, members noted that communication between the council and Colas is not always clear. When trying to deal with one complaint about a planter, neither the council nor Colas accepted responsibility for the issue.

Doug Gray, Grounds Maintenance Manager explained that:

280 hectares of council land is mown. There are different regimes depending on the location and type of grass. The frequency has decreased over the years; it was average of 16 per year and is now 9-12.

The grass in parks and cemeteries are mown fortnightly. Grass in sports fields is cut as and when in Winter and fortnightly during the rest of the year.

A list of the council's 13 urban meadow areas are attached to these minutes as appendix B.

There are three types of wildflower meadow areas: the first type is annual cultivated urban meadows with the colourful displays the other two types are annual meadows with cultivated cycle associated with farming (annual sow, cut down harrow self-seed) and then perennial wildflowers.

In the last 4-5 years, 24 meadow areas have been created with colourful wildflower mixes covering 2,500m²

In response to questions, he explained that:

The three types of urban meadows one is with perennials and the other two types are with annuals.

There is no formal monitoring of the areas. There have been no complaints therefore other areas will be considered.

Reducing the frequency of mowing, saves money and carbon emissions and also increases biodiversity.

The creation of wildflower meadows is not part of a council strategy. It is simply ad hoc. There are no specific policies regarding rewilding or urban meadows.

Removing paving stones on some paths could be considered to create meadow pockets in paving subject to any funding.

He would be happy to trial sowing wildflowers along the fence line, near Wimbledon Park.

The Housing Department may be involved in the creation of pocket parks.

They are aiming to have an even distribution of urban meadows across the city.

Action

A map showing the border between council and Portsmouth Water land in Portsmouth Road, Cosham near the MacDonald's will be sent to the Ward Councillors.

Ashley Humphrey, Allotments Manager gave an introduction which included the following points:

He carries out the inspections of all the allotment sites.

There are ten sites in the city and one outside, near Rowlands Castle used by Leigh Park area residents.

Demand for allotments has grown, particularly during the pandemic.

The aim of the allotments is to give people space to cultivate. Up to 25% of a plot may be uncultivated but it must be managed so as not to be a nuisance to the other plot holders. The 25% can also include space for a shed or seating area.

In response to questions, he explained that:

The rules are uniformly applied across all sites. He carries out all the inspections and has a background in horticulture. He also has his own plot so he can understand the challenges that plot holders face.

He listens to people to understand what they are trying to achieve with their plots. Each case is determined on its own merits.

The new allotment holder signs a written agreement and receives a full set of rules.

Inspections are carried out mainly during Summer, normally from mid-March. All the sites are visited. Any holders with an unworked plot, receive a Dirty Plot Letter. They are given 28 days to correct issues or to explain any extenuating circumstances. 28 days later, a follow up inspection is carried out. If the issues have been corrected, the plot holder is told that if there any

further issues in the following 12 months, they will be evicted. If the issue has not been rectified, they will receive a notice to quit letter. Their right to appeal is explained and they are given 7 days to clear their property. The plot is then cleared and relet.

Action

The following information will be sent to the panel:

- A link to the allotment holder rules.

The number of Dirty Plot Letters issued and the number of notice to quit letters is attached to these minutes as appendix C.

On the allotments section of the PCC website, the rules and guidance are set out.

Information about rewilding is available from organisations including the Royal Horticultural Society.

He has a colleague who deals with the administration and Doug's team clears repossessed and vacated plots which is a big drain on resources.

Tyres are sometimes used as planters and if they are left on vacated plots, the disposal is very expensive for the council. They should not be used for growing vegetables as there is a high risk that the tyre could break down and leach contaminants into the soil.

The 25% uncultivated rule was determined by the council and is clearly explained in the rules.

The use of pesticides on allotments is left to the individual. Slug pellets have been withdrawn now. People are expected to act responsibly and use as per the manufacturers instructions. Pesticides sold to the general public are pre-mixed now which prevents some over-use. Most people only use them as a last resort. There are many more younger allotment holders now; they tend to be more ecologically responsible.

There is a lot of biodiversity on the allotments.

The council's policies seem to be about right.

There is very limited scope for the creation on new sites. If one was identified, the water supply and facilities would need to be installed, the plots laid out and prepared. The costs would be very high. Much land has been contaminated in the past and so would not be suitable.

A 250m² plot will be divided into three when it is given back to the council. Smaller, more manageable plots are very popular with younger plot holders. The number of plots has increased from 1,600 (approximately 2010) to 1,800. Post meeting actual number is 1884 in Portsmouth plus 64 at Rowlands Castle.

Some people grow native edible plants. One person planted a poplar tree which they coppice every year and use the leaves for tea.

Waiting lists.

The 3 Milton sites: 4.5 years.

Hilsea Lane, Stamshaw: 18 months - 2 years.

Stamshaw & Tipner: 2 years

Long Meadow: 2 - 2.5 years

Moneyfields: as above

Salisbury Road: 2.5 years

Knowsley Road (7 plots) there are 24 people on the waiting list.

North Harbour: 18 Months.

When you apply, you indicate which site you would like; any/ all/ some. You can even indicate your preferred plot. If you turn down an offer, you will be deferred on the list for 12 months, not just dropped to the bottom.

During the discussion that followed, the panel considered the following points:

They would like to hear the view of the other Chairs of Allotment Associations who weren't able to attend the previous meeting, plus the views of representatives from council residents associations and housing blocks. A series of questions were agreed.

Trees must be maintained and not permitted to overgrow. Younger trees absorb more carbon dioxide and particulates than older ones. The council's arboriculture officer will be invited to a future meeting.

Information on bus companies' policies regarding wheelchair users and people with pushchairs and prams using the same space on the bus was received and is attached to these minutes as appendix D.

Councillor Lee Mason
Chair

Appendix A

Views from Ms M Chanvin, Portsmouth resident.

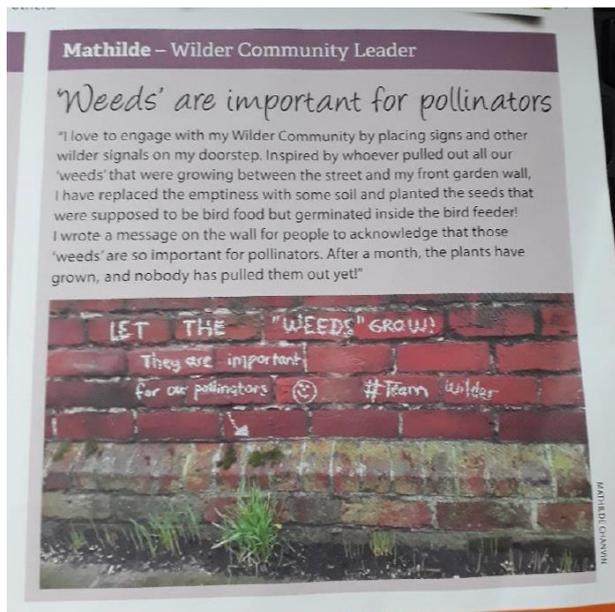
Dear members of the cross party biodiversity scrutiny panels

Please find my personal views about the current policies around greening in Portsmouth for the meeting held on Tuesday 14th December 2021.

I am a resident of Portsmouth since 2012 and I call this place Home. As a nature lover and an active member of various local environmental groups (Portsmouth and Southsea Wildlife Watch, Zero Waste Portsmouth, Wilder Portsmouth, and rewilding Brambles school and nursery), I have witnessed an increase / took part in amazing local actions and initiatives to improve/create green spaces and enhance biodiversity protection across the city. These initiatives, combined with the progress made by the City Council on various occasions (beautiful wildflower beds in Milton or Bransbury parks, new trees planted across the City) are to be celebrated.

There is an improvement, but I personally believe that more can be done, and especially with companies working with PCC about managing our green spaces. We are in desperate need of more green spaces in Portsmouth. We need more verges, grass, wildflower, and green corridors for bees and butterflies and other wildlife to thrive. Any action counts if we want to stop the disastrous effect of climate change on biodiversity.

I would like the panel, and especially Colas, to listen to local communities when they complain about the verges being cut in the parks and our “weeds” being cut and spread right in our front door (it happens every time in front of my house (especially on Earth Day in 2021!) although I have put a sign to leave it! – see pictures below), the grass being mown in cemeteries. I feel really concerned about the weed cutting and whether pesticides are used to get rid of the plants in our streets. Pesticides are harmful to us, wildlife (especially pollinators) and plants and I hope there is a way to stop using it all together.



My front wall with “weed growing” space and sign featured in the Wild Life magazine (Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust). – March 2021



My front wall empty of grass and soil due to Colas’s intervention – April 2021.

There is nothing more beautiful than a poppy growing and blossoming within the crack of a street pavement. Such a pleasure for our eyes and a fantastic pit stop for a bee. Here are some poppies flowering in Spring time in my street.



Having green bus shelters, more trees and wild plants in the streets, wildflower beds in streets, each roundabout or across cemeteries, or letting the flowers and “weeds” grow wherever it is possible (street and allotments) would be such an improvement to make our city, my home, a better place to live, breath and walk, and for biodiversity to thrive.

I wish that Colas would just leave the weed growing if people wish to keep them thanks to signs.

Local communities, groups, councillors, employers, we all need to be on board to protect the existing and increase biodiversity space across Portsmouth. Let's work and collaborate together for a Wilder Portsmouth.

Thank you,

Appendix B

A list of the council's urban meadow areas

Site	Pockets	Total areas
College Pk - NE corner circle bds	2	28
Althorpe Drive - grassed areas crossing point - 4 sections	4	114
Copnor Bridge Shrub Bed 2 beds south side of the bridge	2	91
Prison Corner	1	22
Tamworth Park + 20sqm memorial planting	3	46
Hempstead Green	8	299
Portsmouth Road, Cosham	2	150
Bransbury Park 20m2 memorial planting	3	20
Zetland Field - Zetland/ Fitzherbert Rd mound	1	20
Bransbury Grds	2	110
Clarendon Gardens, Southsea	3	75
Western Prd	4	189
Pembroke Triangle - vandalised memorial	1	3
Pier Rd RAB planters	7	5
Rock Garden Frontage	5	123
Southsea Castle - Moat (Create wildflower area to left of bridge in moat).	1	60
Ladies Mile - western strip length of wall (3 colour mix cosmos with height)	1	97.5
Canoe Lake 'dig for victory' bed area 2019	1	36
St James Green	1	395
Kingston Recreation Ground - Play area (perennials)	3	0
Lake Road, Buckland	4	288
Mills Road, Stamshaw	2	108
Milton Pk (within West contract)	2	175
Queen Street, Portsea	1	245
		2,399.5m ²

Appendix C

Information requested from the Allotment Manager.

Over the past three years 579 Dirty Plot letters were issued, 92 plots were dispossessed from these and a further 59 were dispossessed for failing to work the plot properly within the following 12 months so total repossessions over the last 3 years were 151.

Issuing of DP letters was suspended during the pandemic due to shielding and restrictions between July 2020 and June 2021.