

TRAFFIC, ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel held on Tuesday, 11 January 2022 at 4pm at the Civic Offices, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Lee Mason (in the Chair)
Stuart Brown
Charlotte Gerada
Hannah Brent
Leo Madden

38. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

No apologies were received.

39. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

No interests were declared.

40. Minutes of the Previous Meeting (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

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

Councillor Darren Sanders, Cabinet Member for Housing & Preventing Homelessness asked the panel to consider the following points:

He and the Liberal Democrat administration are very pleased that this review is being undertaken and considers it vital to achieving the council's goals. A significant amount has been achieved including planting, by late 2021:

33,300 plants, shrubs and hedges

671 trees

257,000 daffodil bulbs.

4,220 m² wildflower meadows have been created in Lake Road, Princeton Road, Kingston Road and other areas.

Areas for greening are identified over the Autumn and Winter.

Residents are encouraged to make their gardens more wildlife-friendly and be more self-sufficient. A scheme, based out of Landport Community Garden, has begun and is being developed further.

There is a wilder, greener plan for Buckland.

His experience as champion for the Charles Dickens Community Orchard project had seen him help them get permissions to plant on land owned by different parts of the Council. This is getting better due to the new

appointments that encourage co-ordination. When appropriate, requests for areas on Housing land are agreed.

In response to questions from the panel, he explained that:

Some Housing Association tenants are not permitted to have mats or plant pots outside their front doors because of fire regulations.

In council blocks, a balanced approach is taken about plants hanging over communal balconies; taking into account safety and whether there is a culture for planting in the block. A list stipulating exactly what is permitted would not be appropriate for all cases.

The council encourages residents to grow fruit and vegetables. It does not discourage people from taking ownership of some areas but does not proactively encourage them to do so. Cases are assessed on their individual circumstances.

The council would welcome the panel's input into a policy regarding what council residents can do in terms of greening.

The next steps identified in the greening strategy update that came to Cabinet on 5 October 2021 are moving forward.

Green walls in Grafton Street and Estella Road are being progressed. This is part of a wider plan to green key traffic corridors to cut air pollution. For example, trees and shrubs had been put into council blocks on Eastern Road, Northern Parade, Kingston Road, Church Street, and various locations in Somerstown. Officers had also contacted Cosham councillors to discuss something similar on Southampton Row, as that is also a key traffic corridor. Councillors agreed to meet officers to discuss using CIL money, as had happened on Church Street in Charles Dickens ward.

The management of greening initiatives falls within the Clean & Green Team.

As far as he is aware, a comparison of all local authority estates across the city in terms of greening has not been carried out and he was not sure the benefit it would bring, given the differences between estates. Housing Association properties have varying types of green measures and areas. Registered Social Landlords tend to be more remote since their operations were centralised.

Residents are encouraged to be more self-sufficient in terms of growing more fruit and vegetables. Which can be supported by the service Community Gardener role.

He is keen that living roofs be installed where possible.

In 2017 council officers changed their approach to planting e.g. planting long-term shrubs which has resulted in savings, and requiring less maintenance.

Whilst the Leamington and Horatia Community Panel's aim is to ensure that the area is as green as possible whilst keeping the rents as low as possible, he recognised that this may not be feasible. York City Council has the largest Passive House Programme but is finding it difficult to fund that while delivering social rent levels.

The PassivHaus pilot in Havant runs alongside other measures to see if this type of design will work. He hoped it would, but wanted to be guided by the evidence.

Langstone Gardens is at the rear of Jura Close. There was a mistake in his amendment to the notice of motion at a previous Full Council meeting.

The carbon dioxide emissions will increase when the port becomes a free port. Air pollution affects the poorest people disproportionately.

Councillor Sanders offered to assist with chasing up any outstanding questionnaires that had been sent to the council and housing block representatives.

In response to questions from the panel, Phil Bentley, Head of Estate Services explained that:

The council supports residents having plants on balconies and outside their front doors where appropriate. There is no specific policy regarding this. Potential fire risks are considered and a 'managed use policy' is followed with each case being assessed on its own merits.

Where housing blocks have built in planters to communal balconies the service plants flowers in blocks - such as in Old Commercial Road where annual flowers are planted every year.

Wild meadows have been planted on housing land in various sites across the city by the service.

He is very open to ideas for improving biodiversity in the city and installing beehives where possible, the first site is Gloucester Terrace, just off Kings Road, where the service is working with Portsmouth District Beekeepers Association to build knowledge and experience before expanding further. Key considerations for additional beehives include risk associated to the bees swarming near houses / housing blocks, ASB risk, vandalism to the hive.

Green walls absorb carbon dioxide. Climbing plants have been planted on the garages in Graffton Street and Estella Road. It is important to mitigate the high levels of air pollution in this area with measures such as these.

Planting has been prioritised on key trunk roads throughout the city to improve air quality.

During the discussion that followed, members noted that:

The building blocks are in place to assist residents to take responsibility for greening, however the procedure needs to be streamlined.

It seems that improving biodiversity is more important for the environment than rewilding.

Zoe White, Green & Healthy Streets Coordinator included the following points in her presentation:

In 2019 the Cabinet received reports on the development of Green Infrastructure for the city. At the same time, discussions around the response to the climate emergency were developing; and the city was considering the responses to challenges around air quality.

It was therefore agreed that it would be sensible to develop a single approach to increasing the greenery in the city. The greening Portsmouth strategy was approved in March 2020

Focus of the work from the strategy has been:

- To double canopy coverage in the city, we need to add 360 new trees in parks and open spaces, and 120 new street trees (net of replacements) every year for the next 25 years.
- However, we accept that we are in the midst of a climate emergency and therefore planting has been significant over the past 2 years.
- Winter 2020/2021, 150,000 mixed plants, shrubs and trees on housing land, 6 wildflower meadows on highway, 17 areas of rewilding on park land, 22 urban meadows and wildflower meadows on park land and 998 trees across both.
- Winter 2021/2022, we have plans to plant 208 standard trees on housing and park land 8000 whips to create native hedges.
- Therefore, we have rapidly increased planting numbers over a short period of time.

Our greening strategy will naturally enhance the biodiversity of the City but it isn't specific to this need and doesn't reflect on plant specific planting to protect and enhance the animals, insects and ecosystems.

However, we do know that the more plants and trees we invest into the City of any kind, the more homes we create for a variety of insects and animal species. Creating greater biodiversity and a healthier ecosystem!

- As well as preserving trees and greenery in the city, we need to proactively take other measures such as enhancing lower-level planting (hedges and shrubbery).
- Gardens can also be really beneficial through helping ensure that neighbourhoods are more resilient to some of the impacts of climate

change, but also through the benefits they bring to local ecology and overall biodiversity in the area.

- It is recognised that some of the UKs declining wildlife species are now found more often in gardens than anywhere else. With gardens playing host to a range of species, they can be the main avenue through which people witness the natural environment day to day.
- A significant proportion of the city is covered by private gardens due to the highly built-up nature of Portsmouth, which equates to 17.7% of the entire area of the city.
- Many gardens are now completely paved over with artificial materials, and devoid of natural surfaces or vegetation such as trees and shrubs

Our work plan in relation to greening and biodiversity includes the following:

- We need to continue developing a programme of communication and activity to make sure that everyone in the city understands our approach to trees and greenery and give people help and advice to play their own part.
- We will consider how we can improve the information around the city about trees and greenery so that people can understand why these things are important and republish the Tree Charter for the city.
- We will create a strong mechanism for gathering feedback about where people think a "greening intervention" could be helpful and make sure that we respond to ideas on a regular basis. This will help us keep our action plan fresh and up to date.
- Our work with Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and the local community is helping us to support the community with our push to increase greenery, biodiversity and development of ecosystems.
- We now have a dedicated senior comms officer who will lead on climate change/ green / carbon topics.
- We have engaged St James hospital into a programme with Earth watch to plant trees and improve the biodiversity on their site.
- Our work with schools is also helping to increase greenery and education around biodiversity and ecosystems. Manor infant school is the latest project with a community planting day on Saturday 22nd January - funded provided through our links with Trees for Cities.
- Our most recent project is to support new Horizons school with funding opportunities to create a greening project on their site, with landscape advice from Helen Bergin - Landscape architect.

- Our focus for Spring will be to engage more schools in greening and biodiversity. We are hoping to work in partnership with Trees for Cities who deliver an excellent funded schools programme.

Our measures of success

To measure success, we will seek to baseline our current tree stock, greenery and open space, and reassess on an appropriate basis to benchmark:

- Number of trees
- Canopy cover
- Air quality
- Engagement levels
- Open space quality assessment

To further develop our duty to demonstrate our commitment to conserving and restoring biodiversity we can:

- develop policies and strategies set out to work towards the Council's declared Climate and Ecological Emergency and put them into practice - strategies that can be used and adopted by all directorates.
- Identify habitats and species in the City that are of national, regional and local importance and outline a plan of action for their protection, management and enhancement (some of this work has been done - geese at Great Salterns)

In response to questions from the panel, she explained that:

A clear biodiversity strategy would empower departments and ensure a consistent approach is applied so that all parts of the city receive support.

The grant for the planting of 208 standard trees and 8,000 whips year includes five years of watering and maintenance. After that time, a tree needs less frequent watering and is established. There will naturally be increased maintenance costs year on year. Service managers may need to discuss the budget needs with their directors and finance leads.

We don't yet know if the greening the city budget will continue each year. We will be focusing on the work that schools and communities can do to green their schools, gardens and outside spaces. We will continue to look for additional funding opportunities.

Street trees are significantly more expensive to plant due to the costs through the PFI contract and due to the built up urban areas many trees don't survive unless the right type of tree pits are installed. Therefore we are focusing on areas where we make a significant difference.

The council is working to encourage big landowners to take responsibility for greening their land. One example of this, is the hospital which has undertaken a successful greening project with support from the council.

Schools are supported to find funding opportunities.

The Education Superzone Programme at Arundel Court School is a place-based approach to coordinated public policy and community action, aiming to reduce childhood obesity in one specific area. We are focusing on improving green spaces to encourage outdoor activity and safe spaces for children and families.

Redevelopment of Arundel Park was due to a safer streets initiative This project is a joint project with the police and crime commissioner with the goal of reducing crime and encouraging safety in the park, which aligns with the need to improve green space and support the superzone work.

A project is currently being explored where QR codes would be put up in parks linking to information about the plants and ecosystems.

The £35,950 funding from Forgotten Places included training development days for volunteers and free literature.

She would like to see improved communication with residents to encourage them to take ownership of greening their gardens or balconies or communal space. Wider education around that would make a significant difference. A fun and interactive Instagram campaign is currently being discussed that would show what steps you can take to make your garden more attractive to wildlife. This campaign and website pages with this information are being drawn up with the new Communications Officer.

Funding was applied for a joint project called The Journey of a Bee is underway with the University of Portsmouth to create a green wall on for Central Library. As bees need green areas to be close together in order to find enough food, this wall would be the starting point for a series of green areas throughout the city in areas with low air quality. Unfortunately, the bid was unsuccessful and the costs are huge, so other ideas will be explored. Rather having green walls, self-sustainable plants could be encouraged to climb naturally.

The council is working with partners to discuss green roofs on bus stops.

Green roofs on public toilets is being looked into but is very costly.

600 whips will be planted at Manor Infant School. The council has helped the school secure funding from the City Partnership Programme, the delivery is volunteer-led and the school will maintain them.

Ms White explained that she is very keen to get in contact with more schools to encourage them to green their grounds.

Ian McCormack, Energy & Environment Manager at the University of Portsmouth included the following points in his presentation:

The university's Biodiversity Action Plan was produced eight years ago by the Hants & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. It could be refreshed but the estate is mostly land-locked and so improving biodiversity and greening can be challenging.

The university is aiming to achieve BREEAM¹ Sustainable Construction for design 'outstanding' rating for its new buildings which includes the biodiversity value of the space, the site selection, the impact of the building, the long-term eco management and other eco features. The design is assessed over the first year of the building in operation to confirm the rating.

In the park around Ravelin Sports Centre new planting includes wildflowers and herbs, 140 native trees plus bird & bat boxes and possibly beehives. The building's roof has wildflowers and solar panels. It is hoped that something similar can be included for the Victoria Building.

In response to questions, he explained that:

He works in energy, environment and waste management and has a good working relationship with the council. He would welcome working with the biodiversity team.

He was very receptive to the idea of students being involved in project work with the council e.g. greening projects, a communication campaign or undertaking surveys. One such joint working that worked well was working with the council to improve street litter and recycling at student residences.

A section could be added to the digital student handbook about how they could manage their back gardens for wildlife (subject to approval) or contribute in other ways. Many staff also live in the city and therefore communication could also be targeted to them.

All unusable food waste at the university is sent for anaerobic digestion. All non-fresh products (tins, drinks) are given to the John Pound Centre for the 'food cycle' scheme. The university is always looking at ways to reduce food waste. Fresh food is packaged and provided to students in 'magic bags' via the 'too good to go' app at discounted prices.

In the discussion that followed, members noted that some students did not feel able to green their garden as they rent their properties or do not feel part of the community. Perhaps a working group of professionals and organisations would be helpful.

Members then discussed the work programme and requested that views be requested from:

- Langstone Harbour Board
- The Planning Service
- The Education Department

Councillor Lee Mason
Chair

¹ Building research Establishment's Environmental Assessment Method.