

Biodiversity Scrutiny Panel: [Portsmouth Climate Action Board](#) Policy Review Group submission

Portsmouth Climate Action Board

Set up in 2019 by the local authority as the result of a Climate Emergency motion, which passed unanimously at Full Council.

The remit of the Board is to i) raise awareness of the climate and ecological emergency, ii) inspire and facilitate climate action in the city, and iii) lobby local and central government to green their own policies.

Terms of Reference can be found here:

https://www.portsmouthclimateaction.org.uk/assets/documents/response-to-climate-emergency-strategy_appendix-3.pdf

The Policy Review Group is a subgroup of the Board set up in October 2020.

Members of the Board Policy Review group: Nick Sebley, Clare Seek, Rod Bailey (Portsmouth Climate Alliance), Heather Rumble (UoP), Dr. Mark Gaterell (UoP), Trish Bell (Charles Dickens Community Orchard), Celia Clarke (Portsmouth Society), Deniz Beck (Sustainable Conservation Trust), Sienna Somers (Wildlife Trust), Simon Sansbury (Pompey Politics Podcast), Nick Hopper (local architect)

The Board and biodiversity: Biodiversity is fundamental to us slowing down and being able to live with climate change. Biodiverse ecosystems are currently shielding us from many of the impacts of climate change and they will continue to ameliorate the impacts of climate change in the future. In cities, this includes protecting us from flash flooding, the urban heat island and, of course, promoting our mental and physical health, making us more resilient. Ensuring cities are biodiverse is a win win for any city.

Mowing frequencies in parks

Doug Gray, PCC Grounds Maintenance Manager, mentioned in his submission to this panel that: *The grass in parks and cemeteries are mown fortnightly.*

He later notes that: *Reducing the frequency of mowing, saves money and carbon emissions and also increases biodiversity*

Would it be possible to explore (perhaps in a trial area) reducing this fortnightly frequency and mowing less regularly?

Close and frequent mowing of grass areas means they can become parched in warm / dry weather leading to bare soil. We see this on Southsea Common every summer, when it turns yellow. Bare soil leads to the emission of carbon. Allowing grass to grow longer before cutting (every 3 or 4 weeks?) would lessen the risk of this happening.

Doug also mentioned that: *He would be happy to trial sowing wildflowers along the fence line, near Wimbledon Park.*

This is something Portsmouth Climate Alliance members would strongly support, and could help consult Wimbledon Park residents on.

Wildlife garden support service

As previous submissions have noted:

Private gardens in Portsmouth account for nearly 1/5th of the entire surface area of the city, but quite a few are paved or treated with harsh chemicals that harm insects, bees, and birds.

The Climate Action Board would be interested in developing, in partnership with PCC, UoP and HIWWT, a wildlife garden advice / support team that can respond to resident requests for help creating wildlife friendly gardens / organic food growing / depaving. This could also be offered to schools.

This scheme could be means tested so that those on low incomes are helped for free, funded by wealthier residents who could be charged. Volunteer groups like the Green Gym / Urbond are very willing to help do initial clearance work, and residents could be guided about and supported with what to plant, how to maintain the garden etc

Wilder Eastney site

In March 2020 The Board invited residents to contact them if they wanted to help enhance the flora and biodiversity of green spaces where they lived.

A group of residents near Marine Court Green, Eastney got in touch and asked if they could add some wildflowers, raised beds and fruit trees to the site.

Negotiations with PCC took awhile but eventually a planting plan was formed and permission was given, and a number of community groups such as Forgotten Veterans UK, Southsea GreenHouse, the Waterfront Centre, Charles Dickens Community Orchard came to the first event in September.

Bluebells, snowdrops and wild grasses were sown under the trees, and a raised bed built.



Since then liaison with PCC (Adrian Rozier in particular) has been really quick and helpful in deciding how the site can be developed

Another event was held in December where 20 dwarf fruit trees were planted, and adopted (informally) by residents to commemorate loved ones that had passed recently.

It was a very attended event, and we had lots of positive feedback

PCC Greening Coordinator Zoe White is now working on a protocol to make it easier for community groups to carry out similar schemes, without such a long initial wait.



Damson (Prunus) Farleigh

Maiden

Wavit©

Very small with a blue-black bloom. Good Quality
Hardy and most likely to crop regularly in northern
districts.

THE TREE COUNCIL



Use of pesticides within allotments

Ashley Humphery, Allotments Manager, mentioned in his submission that:

The use of pesticides on (PCC managed) allotments is left to the individual.

Whilst there may be a lack of affordable alternatives to herbicide / pesticide use on public pavements / spaces; in an allotment setting there are proven wildlife friendly alternatives available.

Given this, the Board Policy Review Group would like to propose that PCC

i) provide information to allotment holders (as part of their introduction pack) of the consequences for wildlife of using pesticides

ii) suggest alternative nature based pest and disease control measures, including increasing habitat for frogs and toads (ponds)

OR even better introduce a 'Wildlife Friendly' policy on their allotments where only Soil Association approved herbicides / pesticides are allowed

[RSPB states on its website:](#)

- Pesticides disrupt food webs, killing plants and insects and removing weed seeds from the environment, which may be essential food or habitat for other wildlife.
- RSPB research, and the work of other organisations, has shown that these food chain impacts affect the grey partridge, corn bunting and yellowhammer. Other wildlife, particularly insect-eating species, are likely to be affected, so more research is urgently needed to understand more about indirect effects of pesticides and to develop ways of minimising these effects.
- Pesticide use brings other risks. If pesticides enter waterways they can harm biodiversity and pose a threat to human health. Water companies spend money every year removing pesticides from drinking water, a cost that is passed onto the customer.

The following lists percentage declines of some bird species recorded in the Common Bird Census between 1970 and 1999:

- Tree sparrow -95 per cent
- Corn bunting -88 per cent

- Willow tit -78 per cent
- Spotted flycatcher -77 per cent
- Woodcock -74 per cent
- Starling -71 per cent
- Turtle dove -71 per cent
- Song thrush -56 per cent
- Bullfinch -53 per cent
- Skylark -52 per cent
- Cuckoo -33 per cent

Strimming / flailing / spraying of wildlife friendly verges and hedges

Fruiting Hedge in Hilsea (submission from Charles Dickens Community Orchard)

Fruiting hedges do best when allowed to grow 50cm per year until about 5' wide, which allows the fruits to be harvested by animals and people. If they are cut back harshly each year by a flail machine, they won't produce fruit.

There is a fruiting hedge in Hilsea planted by the Tree Wardens which has been growing for 12 years. It is not treated as a fruiting hedge by Colas, it is harshly cut back and is never allowed to fruit. It's just treated as a normal hedge.

Could the PCC liaison with COLAS (Michael McLaughlin) ask them to manage this hedge differently, so it has an opportunity to fruit?

Hornsea Lane Allotment site

The verges around the allotment site were informally looked after by the allotment group. They let them reflower.

(Horsea lane Tipnor. PO2 9NU)



However the verges were repeatedly sprayed / strimmed by the council or a contractor



The allotment group contacted the Climate Action Board for help, and we referred the issue on to Adrian Rozier who arranged a meeting with Ashley Humphery, the allotment manager; the issue seems to have been resolved with an agreement that the group will now be responsible for stewardship of the verge

Could a PCC protocol be developed that allows community groups to more easily take over wildlife friendly stewardship of such verges ?

Tree care in general

Trees can be severely damaged by strimming, and their growth set back by many years.

We would like to propose that strimming within 0.5m of tree trunks should be avoided OR contractors / groundspeople given clear instruction about avoiding damage to trees when strimming.

Consistent watering and mulching of trees is also essential for their survival, especially as summers become drier and hotter.

Question: Do contractors have any training on wildlife friendly ground maintenance / tree care?

Communication between teams

We believe that biodiversity would improve if there was greater communication between teams that carry-out grounds maintenance. The Charles Dickens community orchards have suffered some losses due to information not being passed from one team to another.

We would like to propose that site history / care plans be recorded as part of the history of the area and subsequently passed on to the new team taking over. Whether it be a new contractor or otherwise.

Dr. Heather Rumble

Portsmouth is an island so connectivity with the main land needs to be thought about. West side of Portsmouth is particularly lacking on this. In the previous minutes it's striking that councillors talk about "their patch" and it's contribution to biodiversity. There needs to be joined up thinking on this. Wards encompassing Hilsea Lines, Portsdown Hill etc., need to find ways to spread biodiversity into the rest of the city.

Portsmouth has very patchy municipal greenspace, with very little on the west side of the island. This is also a relatively deprived area. Research in other cities shows consistent patterns of fewer gardens, fewer municipal green spaces and more paved and astroturfed gardens in areas of lower socioeconomic status. So if a baseline survey of biodiversity is to be done, particular attention needs to be directed at gardens on the West side of Portsmouth, where residents may need more support to make up for the shortfall in municipal greenspace. Great that the new country park is to be on this side of the island; Needs connecting to gardens and other green spaces.

Engagement with general population is paramount. Environmental custodianship is needed to enhance wellbeing and will allow the council to justify changes more easily. An engaged public also means more likelihood that the council will be held to account; on the face of it, they may not want this, but it means their biodiversity strategy is much more likely to succeed. Needs to be beyond information boards (though these would be good!). Art, iconography, films. Needs to be a core part of Portsmouth's cultural offer.

More could be done to encourage wildlife gardening. In such a dense city, wild gardens, wild road verges, street trees and green infrastructure are really the best

options to connect greenspaces. Enhancement of existing greenspaces with some connected wilder areas would also be good. For example, Southsea Common could have some wildflower strips or (even better, though not popular) some areas of shrub. Already some great examples of wildflower areas in the city e.g. top of Lion Terrace. Need more and better connection.

There is quite a lot in the biodiversity strategy about minimising impact on important habitats and most of these are on the coast, which is also heavily used by Portsmouth residents. The green network/local ecological network needs to balance undisturbed habitat with features that will draw people to them and away from the coast. In reality this means making quite large corridors or being more ambitious in terms of the number, so some are purely for wildlife. You can draw people towards certain routes using named footpaths/set walks.

Systemic issues

No ecologist on the PCC payroll?

No ecosystem valuation carried out

Currently the socio-economic costs of carbon emissions / biodiversity loss are not factored into PCC policies and calculations

Likewise the *socio-economic gains* of carbon sequestration and biodiversity enhancement are not measured, so can't be factored into cost-benefit analysis

Council Officer Zoe White mentioned that

'The Education Superzone Programme at Arundel Court School is a placebased 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.'

Perhaps this one way forward: tying greening / biodiversity enhancement to other socio-economic factors that are measured, such as obesity, economic deprivation, ASB etc

Green Roofs

Previous minutes mentioned that there are to be green roof bus shelters installed in Portsmouth. If the council would like some advice on how to make these optimal for

wildlife, please contact Heather Rumble (heather.rumble@port.ac.uk), because green roof ecology is her actual area of research.

Cases studies from elsewhere

Pesticide action in other LAs

<https://www.pan-uk.org/pesticide-free-towns-success-stories/>

Hedgehog Highways

<https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/help-hedgehogs/link-your-garden/>

<https://www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/developers-1.pdf>

Tiny Forest

<https://earthwatch.org.uk/get-involved/tiny-forest>

Other issues

Avoid additional bright lighting in parks to reduce impact on wildlife

Fireworks - impact on biodiversity (noise and plastic waste)

Tiny Forests - create some around the city

Spraying of glyphosate in parks, streets and especially near children's play areas

Thoughts formed during the meeting: Someone suggested fruit orchards may not be the best for wildlife. Fruiting trees are very good for biodiversity. Moreover, orchards, when left to mature, make excellent habitat for very rare species, especially rare beetles such as the stag beetle and noble chafer.

Do the council hold developers to account in relation to submitted plans? For example, was the green wall on Catherine House part of the planning application? It has been dead from about week 3 of construction.

Rachel Hudson talked about the prevalence of tarmac. It is a very serious issue for biodiversity as well as for environmental quality (e.g. promoting flash flooding). Heather Rumble recently interviewed a planner at Eindhoven Council. Eindhoven is a very green city. They talked about "greening by stealth". This meant every time a piece of tarmac was dug up, it was reviewed to see if some of it could be replaced with soil and vegetation. This has led to small patches of greenery everywhere and a slow reclamation of tarmacked areas. The planner mostly put this down to being very persistent in terms of breaking down silos at the local authority.

Someone mentioned different kinds of lighting. Even having street lights on lower poles helps bats, especially if below the tree line. Some cities already do this.

Colas mentioned they will be putting out a tree information sheet. Will it include anything about the benefits of trees? Also mentioned people complaining about blocking out light; It's difficult to believe this, but we will be thanking trees for doing that when climate change hits us properly. There's a reason why all Spanish villas have heavy wooden shutters.

Simon Pearce mentioned the Queens Jubilee Canopy Project and that people don't necessarily have space for trees in their back garden. Could we do a campaign promoting planting shrubs and small stature trees in peoples gardens, or trees in pots? E.g. Elder, apple, guelder rose: All great for biodiversity. A tree doesn't have to be a huge oak.

Councillor Lee Mason mentioned that we have lots of elms. Is there a way of finding out if we have the most in the country or promoting this more? An aspect of biodiversity we can be proud of. We also don't make enough of the brent geese.

Simon Pearce mentioned iTree. Why have we not had an iTree Eco evaluation done?

We need a city biodiversity portal where people can learn about biodiversity in the city. Could we engage residents via a wild neighbourhood award, like Britain in Bloom? Or a wildlife photography of the year award, with a category for back garden wildlife? The Climate Action Board could take on this role.

Mapping biodiversity: Baseline surveys

In the meeting it was discussed quite a few times that we need a biodiversity / greenspace audit. Heather had a few thoughts on this:

- Bioblitzes. This is where members of the public are invited to survey wildlife. Difficult to organise but good for parks etc and help with public engagement.
- Mapping i. I'm sure PCC has lots of GIS experts that could map all the greenspace in Portsmouth and try to characterise it. We have had undergraduate students who have demonstrated that you can tell quite a lot with aerial photography about people's gardens e.g. if they have shrub areas, areas for cultivation etc. We could share how to do this with the council. Alternatively, we could set up some MRes students to create a habitat mastermap for the city, funded by a range of stakeholders in the city (they cost somewhere in the region of £7k each); Would envisage a student mapping gardens, one mapping trees and one mapping other greenspaces.

- Mapping ii. The other way to do this is through community events with paper and pens. Again, we have social scientists that have done things like this at the University. Can be a good start to digitising something.

Minutes and other details of the Biodiversity Scrutiny Panels

[The composition of the panel](#)

[Terms of reference for the review into biodiversity enhancement.](#)

Minutes of previous meetings:

[16 November](#) (the first meeting for this review).

[30 November](#)

[14 December](#)

[11 January](#)