

TRAFFIC, ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel held on Tuesday, 25 January 2022 at 3.30pm at the Guildhall.

Present

Councillor Lee Mason (in the Chair)
Stuart Brown
Hannah Brent
Ryan Brent
Graham Heaney
Leo Madden

42. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Matthew Atkins; Councillor Ryan Brent stood in as his standing deputy and Councillor Charlotte Gerada; Councillor Heaney stood in as her standing deputy.

43. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

No interests were declared.

44. Minutes of the Previous Meeting (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 January be accepted as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

Councillor Ryan Brent attended as Councillor Matthew Atkin's standing deputy.

Members noted that there should be a policy regarding residents placing plants on balconies and outside their front doors.

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

Councillor Barrett's apologies were noted. Members agreed that she would be invited to the next meeting.

Rachel Hudson, Portsmouth Friends of the Earth introduced her paper that had been circulated prior to the meeting and is attached to these minutes as appendix A and in response to questions, explained that:

If public transport and walking & cycling infrastructure were improved, car ownership would reduce, fewer front gardens would be paved over to make driveways and our city's ecosystem would benefit.

PFOE worked with schools and the Natural History Museum for its Bed & Breakfast for Bees campaign which encouraged people to:

- Have an untidy patch in their gardens for insects.
- Create a small pond with pebbles in it.
- Stop using pesticides.

An untidy area in your garden would be more beneficial to wildlife than a bee hotel. A small area in every garden would make a huge difference to the city's ecosystem.

The group has observed that the concreting over of front gardens has increased as has covering tree pits with tarmac right up to the tree trunk.

The council would be in a strong position to liaise with Network Rail about the land along the railway lines. This corridor of land is very important to wildlife.

She suggested that the various groups in the city could assist the council with communication with the public.

It would be hard to give a view on whether the plastic matting put on grass before areas are used for car parking are harmful to the soil. The national Wildlife Trust recommends the use of gravel, and the Royal Horticultural Society recommends that gaps are left and that cars are moved regularly. Generally, people want to do what is good for wildlife so ensuring information is easily available is crucial.

Generally, she would say the less, the better when it comes to AstroTurf.

Everything we do has an impact on biodiversity and our ecosystem.

Steve White, Operations Manager, Colas explained that they deal with Network Rail as they maintain the structures that straddle over railway lines. He offered to arrange a contact for Andy Ames to see if they had a strategy for biodiversity.

Andy Ames, Wilder Communities Project Officer, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust introduced his paper that had been circulated prior to the meeting and is attached to these minutes as appendix B.

The Trust manages two reserves in Portsmouth: Farlington Marshes and Milton Locks and also have a marine team. His role is to engage with the community and has worked with individual residents, pubs, churches, schools, colleges, businesses, organisations and communities. He has carried out a significant amount of work to set up Wilder Schools, Wilder Streets and Wilder Churches.

Hedge removal was highlighted as having a significant impact on the cities wildlife. Hedges absorb lots of carbon as well as been home to a wide variety of wildlife. The Wilder Portsmouth Initiative is a three-year partnership project with Southern Coop currently in its third year. The aim of this final year is to ensure that the work is as sustainable as possible with communities etc working for nature.

The Trust is asking all that Local Authorities including Portsmouth City Council declare a Nature Emergency Motion. The details of what this would cover are set out in appendix B. This would ensure that natures' recovery is at the heart

of all strategic plans. Trees and green spaces should be replaced when they are removed.

Rather than telling people to remove their concrete driveways and plastic grass it is suggested that we need to look at what they could add to make the driveways etc better for them and for wildlife. More people connected to nature will mean more nature in our city which is not only good for nature but is good for the people who live here.

In response to questions from the panel he explained that The Wilder Portsmouth initiative has a clear offer for the city. He feels that engagement with the community is vital but can be a little piecemeal. Many organisations are meeting up and networking effectively. The Portsmouth Climate Action Board is firming up into a voice for climate change action. The Trust has a good relationship with maintained schools via the council. It has encountered some hurdles when trying to engage with academies. The Wilder Portsmouth Programme will target schools this year. He is currently working with 8 or 9 schools. Next year the trust hopes to hold an event where a teacher and 4 pupils from every school will come together to explain what they want to achieve at their schools in terms of increasing biodiversity and greening measures. These aspirations will feed into an action plan for the city.

Overall swift numbers have decreased but in some areas of the city they are doing well. We need to find out what they need and how we can provide that in the areas where there numbers are low. Bats are affected by light pollution and tend to be located in the East of the city. Hedgehogs are very rare now in Portsmouth. If you want a hedgehog in your garden, speak to your neighbours about everyone putting holes in your garden fences/ walls so hedgehogs can have a large territory to find food, water and shelter.

The Trust has a dedicated team of experts who work with local authority planning officers. All new developments should have an Environmental Impact Assessment included in their applications. He does not know if they all do. Hedges and trees are both important. Many hedges were removed because they were considered untidy or it was more convenient to build a wall instead. If we create the right environments, the wildlife will return.

He has worked with the university over the last couple of years and has many little connections with students and is hoping to expand that input this year.

Action Andy kindly agreed to send in details of the projects he involved in with the university.

The council could consider using new streetlights that channel the light differently and makes it softer and so more bat friendly.

Wildlife areas could be tidy and have signs up explaining how important the patch is to wildlife, as clear messaging is vital to show positive changes and bring people on board.

He suggested that the Traffic & Transportation Liaison Group membership could be extended to various local green groups.

Dr Heather Rumble, Portsmouth Climate Action Board talked through her paper that had been circulated ahead of this meeting and is attached as appendix C.

In response to questions from the panel she explained that:

Green bus shelter roofs is her area of expertise and asked if she could help at all. The Chair advised Dr Rumble to talk to Cllr Stagg, Cabinet Member for Traffic & Transportation as the trial is about to begin.

Slugs can be a problem and so gardeners are advised to create ponds in their gardens or on their allotments.

Most cities are warmer than rural areas by 2-10 degrees. There can be a high mortality rate in summer especially during heat waves. Green spaces can help by releasing water which has a significant cooling impact which extends outside their boundaries.

Trees also provide shade and reflect light but need to be well-watered.

Drought-resistant trees are being considered elsewhere but are not so good for biodiversity as they are not native. A mixture of species would be best.

When asked about the proposed Astroturf on King George V playing fields, she explained that she does not promote Astroturf, but it is important for people to be involved in sport. Climbing plants for the perimeter fences and the greening of the buildings' roofs could be considered there.

The Green Factor Scoring System holds developers to account to ensure they follow through with what they promise in their plans. This is being considered by other Planning Authorities.

She suggested that larger trials be conducted regarding grass mowing. Andy offered to help by consulting Wilder Portsmouth users for the wildflower trial.

Steve White, Operations Manager, Colas explained that Colas is responsible for all the infrastructure on the highway including trees plus cutting the grass on verges. There is a programme of wildflowers on verges which is expanding every year. He offered to help support the council with any communication to the public. He is open to suggestions from the public which will be considered with the council's PFI team.

If a tree is removed, it is replaced on the original site or elsewhere if that is no longer appropriate.

With regard to grass cutting, care is taken to ensure that it does not block sightlines for traffic.

In response to questions from the panel he explained that:

More care is taken to ensure that suitable tree species are planted in residential areas now.

The trees are inspected every four years in accordance with the PFI contract to identify any issues including disease or overgrowing. Sometimes fallen fruit can cause issues for vehicles or pedestrians. Removal is always a last resort and replacements are planted between November and March.

Colas works closely with the council to ensure that clear information is sent to residents regarding trees and the way that they are managed. Many people think they have the right to light. Sometimes satellite television aerials are put up but receive poor reception because reception of nearby trees.

Wildflower areas may cost more than grass to maintain because of the need to overseed them every year and inspect them regularly. The cost can also depend on the area.

It would be a great idea to bring all parties together with regard to greening, biodiversity and wildflowers. The activity is currently a bit disjointed.

Simon Pearce, Arboriculture Officer explained that there are 27,000 trees on the system in many areas and come under different departments including cemeteries, parks, asset management, property, social services, traffic & transportation and education (for schools with a Service Level Agreement with the council).

Most of the trees are inspected every four years; those in high risk areas e.g. education sites are inspected every year. Any defects that are identified are actioned swiftly.

There has been a marked increase in people who are interested in tree planting.

The council's target is to plant 350 trees per year over 20 years. In the last two years, including this year, 4,000 trees have been planted. 1,600 of these were planted last year with help from Colas, the housing service and Charles Dickens Community Orchard.

There is sufficient funding available for tree planting from the Trees for the City and the Tree Council. This money covers two years of watering which our contractors carry out. The Clean & Green Team was awarded a considerable amount from the Tree Council which enabled us to plant 400 whips on Great Salterns Field.

He has engaged with the Portsmouth Tree Wardens.

The council is creating a corridor for nature from Baffins, Great Salterns and along the Eastern Road verges to Farlington.

In response to questions from the panel he explained that

Tree maintenance may be an issue in the future if budgets remain at the same level. He is not able to say how much will be needed in 10-30 years' time.

His team manages the trees on the East of the highway on Eastern Road. He does not know who manages the trees on the other side.

Action

Information on who maintains the trees on the Western side of Eastern Road will be sent to the panel.

The management of the trees along the sea defences, near the Eastern Road does not come under his remit so he could not say why that had been flailed.

Trees are only removed if there is a risk to the public or is causing structural damage.

Trees in parks are inspected every two to three years for issues such as disease. There are not many ash trees in the city and very few cases of Ash Dieback disease. The elms planted are resistant to Dutch elm disease.

For the Queens Canopy Project, people will be asked to plant a tree in their gardens if they can. The council has identified some public areas in case they are required for tree planting.

The council is trying to plant a mixture of tree species that can cope with different conditions.

There is a big Black Poplar at the front of Portsmouth Cathedral but not many have been planted over the years because they require a lot of space. The council is looking at restoring the dense line of poplars in Great Salterns field.

The council is working on a database of tree coverage. I-tree software is very good as it shows the changes over time. The Portsmouth Tree Wardens use Treezilla to plot the trees they plant.

Education is key to empower people to plant the right trees in the right locations.

The council uses a local nursery to source its trees as it does not have the space nor manpower to grow its own trees.

The panel was reminded that the paper provided by Portsmouth Friends of the Earth (appendix A) contains two maps; one shows all the open and green spaces and the second the streets and gardens.