

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

Minutes of the meeting of the Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel held on Tuesday 1 February 2022 at 3.30pm at the Guildhall in Portsmouth.

### **Present**

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

- 46. Apologies for Absence. (AI 1)**  
Councillor Hannah Brent sent her apologies.
- 47. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)**  
No interests were declared.
- 48. Minutes of the Previous Meeting. (AI 3)**  
**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 February be agreed as a correct record.**
- 49. Review into improving biodiversity in urban Portsmouth. (AI 4)**  
Councillor Kimberley, Cabinet Member for Climate Change & the Green Recovery explained that:

Her role is different from other portfolios as it is more strategic which means that she is involved with other Cabinet Members' areas to discuss what they can do in terms of dealing with climate change and the green recovery. She finds this very interesting and helpful.

Although there is no budget for this portfolio, pots of funding pots are available.

When she took on this role, economic development and land use had changed and led to a decline in biodiversity. However, this situation has already improved with all the planting and initiatives that have been carried out since including:

- The planting of greenery and trees along the travel corridor in Southampton Road
- The development of an interactive green assets map
- Wildflower meadow planting
- The trialling of the first bio-retention facility (a rain garden) which is very low maintenance and attractive.

An update report on the Greening Strategy is coming to her portfolio meeting on 9 February and explains the council's clear ambition to improve the urban environment. One key target is increasing tree canopy cover by 400/500 per

year for the next 25 years. Last year 1,600 trees were planted and even more should be planted this year. The strategy will be aligned with the emerging provision set out in the Environment Act 2021 and other relevant strategies including the Health & Wellbeing Plan 2020-2023 and the Portsmouth Local Plan (consultation will be carried out regarding regulation 18).

It is important that greening take place across the city, particularly in areas of high deprivation with not much green spaces. Health and the improving the environment go hand in hand.

She is open to suggestions on greening projects from residents and groups and acknowledged that the council can always do a bit better around community engagement. She has been speaking to Portsmouth Friends of the Earth and Portsmouth Climate Action Board to get an outside view.

Locations for planters are being sought in many areas including Eastney, Charles Dickens, Nelson and Fratton.

Biodiversity loss could be as harmful to our planet as climate change. She supports the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust's suggestion that the council declare a Nature Emergency. The declaration of a Climate Emergency has had a very positive effect in terms of starting discussions across directorates and targets being set.

In response to questions from members, she explained that:

There is no one big thing that the council could do that would make a difference; there are many small actions that would add up to make a significant difference.

The declaration of the Climate Emergency has triggered many important actions including the carbon audit and the carbon budget.

Increasing tree canopy cover across the whole city is very important.

If she were to have a wish list, having more officer time across all the departments and more funding would be high on it. She would also like more rain gardens and parklets.

An interactive map showing all the green infrastructure in the city is being developed.

The council will continue to lobby government explaining why Portsmouth must be treated differently because it has a high population density coupled with a high rate of long-term health conditions, poverty and deprivation so close working with public health is very important.

There are one or two officers in each department that she tends to approach in the first instance.

The process for responding to requests to green areas from community groups needs to be improved so that it is consistent regardless of which department owns the land.

Work has been done to ensure that the Local Plan has a strong policy regarding greening and health.

Anyone with an idea for a green project can apply for money from the Greening Funding pot.

### **Actions**

The following information will be sent to the panel:

- Information on how the council can help community groups with greening projects.
- The eligibility criteria for the Greening Funding pot.

### Tipner West

Megan Carter, Senior Regeneration Manager explained that this is an environmentally protected area with important intertidal and shore habitats. Any planning applications for development would have to show proof that there would be a 10% net gain for wildlife onsite and compensation land would be provided elsewhere.

In response to questions, she explained that:

If the area were to be developed, it would be very difficult to increase the biodiversity of the area by 10%. DEFRA and Natural England would assess the council's plans to ensure that the proposed measures would be effective.

*Post meeting note: There is a well-established technical methodology and valuation process, known as the 'DEFRA Metric', now on version 3.0. This is consistent between all developments applying the metric and is in widespread use as a 'standard' assessment method. This would be assessed by the ecological consultees through a planning submission.*

There are numerous opportunities for a new development to encourage wildlife including installing bee towers.

*Post meeting note: The project will incorporate location-specific ecological objectives that address features within and surrounding the current site, but also offers opportunities to encourage new species and create new niches within the site.*

*Habitats within the site can be carefully zoned and managed for compatibility with use by people, ensuring that conflicts (which are currently widespread around Portsmouth and the Solent, notably dogs off leads and coastal birds) are managed out at the design stage so people and nature can better co-exist.*

The large-scale opportunities for the creation of compensation land could be amazing. Investigations have been carried out to assess the feasibility of

building a new intertidal island in the north of Portsmouth harbour. Undisturbed land like this would be very beneficial to wildlife *and provide a habitat that has long been lost from Portsmouth Harbour, is in high demand by the bird species present and could be managed in the face of further climate change losses of this within-harbour habitat (post meeting note).*

The new Horsea Island Country Park that is being developed also presents a very good opportunity to encourage wildlife to the area and *represents a newer, developing area of habitat that can target the provision of more diverse habitats locally (post meeting note).*

The intertidal mud area that is so important to wildlife will be lost to rising sea levels if no action is taken *and new flood defences to protect the existing land mass and wider area are installed (post meeting note).*

There are ecologists in the team that push developers to do the best they can for wildlife.

*All the above measures will mostly benefit not just from their creation or establishment, but by being brought into planned and funded management over the long term with specific, measurable biodiversity objectives, in a way that many local habitats would only have such objectives as informal or less targeted or committed objectives. This kind of management is essential to the long-term success of any biodiversity outcomes. This needs to recognise that the current management of the wider development site does not deliver this; the nature benefits of the site are residual/incidental; the development would bring this into a formal objective approach (post meeting note).*

The Environment Act is helpful, and the council will ensure that its emerging policies and Supplementary Planning Documents take this into account. To a certain extent, we are playing catch up as this is the first Local Plan for seven years.

The council does a lot to improve its existing assets. *A balance here between noting that PCC does its best, but that the current biodiversity within the site is apparently incidental, rather than planned land use management for biodiversity in any significant sense. The development would have a much stronger focus on management for biodiversity outcomes, following construction phase disruption (post meeting note).*

Councillor Barrett added that they are pushing the planning department to influence developers and tell them the high standards that the council expects.

In response to questions, Tristan Samuels, Director for Regeneration added that the area created in compensation would be located between the harbour and Chichester. Arun is the furthest point we are currently surveying.

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for the council's response to climate change because it is not the responsibility of just one directorate; all of them do their bit. The directorates have different priorities.

When the Private Finance Initiative contract was set up with Colas 17 years ago, the Key Performance Indicators focussed on roads. The parks service's priority was that green spaces were safe for people to enjoy. A cultural change is happening to bring the focus to encouraging wildlife but it will take time. This is not for the want of trying. This is a priority for directors but one of many.

#### Action

The estimated costs for the creation of an island in Portsmouth harbour will be sent to the panel.

#### **Portsdown Hill.**

The Portsdown Hill Management Plan non SSSI 2022-2026 and the Portsdown Hill SSSI Plan 2021-25 were published with the agenda.

Richard Jones, Countryside Officer explained that he is responsible the management of Portsdown Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSI), which is around 55 ha (the size of 70 football pitches) and extends from east of Fort Widley to west of Fort Southwick. The aim is to maintain a continuous sheet of flower-rich grassland with a mix of scrub and other habitats in a mosaic. He shares the maintenance of a similar area of adjacent open space land with the Parks Grounds Maintenance Team. His management emphasis on this land is conservation management whilst parks colleagues attend to amenity issues.

A wildlife survey written in the 1970s described the area as having a rich insect and plant life, but it was a shattered relic compared to how it was a generation before. The site was then abandoned to misuse and invasive scrub encroachment before restoration began in the 1990s. Recent surveys show the site is recovering well.

Portsdown is good example of species-rich chalk grassland. It is a much-diminished habitat, very rich in biodiversity. It is an important habitat for pollinators and a great variety of plants which in turn are essential food plants for the larval stage of numerous insects, allowing many species to complete their life cycle.

The non-SSSI land contains former agricultural fields, amenity grasslands and chalk pits areas which are managed to complement the habitats on the SSSI as well as generic open space for people to enjoy. Habitat management to sites along the hill is important as they provide vital connectivity for biodiversity along the hill. Mowing regimes have been changed to cut and clear or haymaking on many areas that were formerly under amenity mowing, a process that began in the late 1990s. Grazing is used to restore a former arable site to species rich grassland.

Seeds and green hay from the flower rich SSSI have been transferred to land undergoing restoration to encourage the reversion to a desirable habitat with locally adapted plants. Trees and shrubs have been translocated from elsewhere on Portsdown to establish hedges and tree seeds sown to facilitate natural scrub and woodland regeneration.

Portsdown is an urban fringe site with associated problems including, littering, fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour. Legitimate public usage is factored into the management. Attending to this is a drain on efforts to conserve the site.

Surveys show the hill is a biodiversity hotspot and compares well with similar sites, for example the National Nature reserves in the Meon Valley and adds to the offer of Portsmouth.

In response to questions, he added that:

He engages with other agencies including Fareham Borough Council and the County Council and the Biodiversity Officer at Portsmouth Water about the managing adjacent land on Portsdown with a coordinated wildlife-sympathetic approach. Having an overarching plan for all the land including what is outside the Portsmouth boundary would have some mileage.

There is a healthy number of volunteers involved on this site, around 6,000 hrs of volunteers time a year. They are getting older, and it may be useful to encourage young people to join in. However, the number you can have working on tasks is limited to space, tools and the activity.

It should be a default that all land is managed for biodiversity and climate change mitigation unless there is a good reason for not doing so. It is important that the soil conditions on both the land and the adjacent areas are understood to provide an ecological overview of the whole area. There is good advice and case studies available but the use of site-specific management options is necessary for the best outcome.

The Top Field at Portsdown Hill is a former arable site that is managed for conservation and public access. The soil is unproductive, thin and chalky and was chalk grassland in the 1960s. In 2010 when it was returned to the council's management, the soil conditions were evaluated, and it was found to be suitable for establishing species-rich grassland. Thus, it was eligible for Environmental Stewardship funding. Green hay and seeds from local plants were introduced, hedges and companion scrub blocks were planted in the same way. Owls, stonechats and skylarks occupy or use the site. Currently nine cattle graze the area a few weeks a year.

The blocks of scrubs provide diverse habitats. Hedges were planted along two sides that border the busy roads. The public open space does not need as much management. The wildlife complements the wildlife in adjacent sites. It would be very helpful if this approach could be incorporated into the council's policies.

*(Post meeting note: If biodiversity is to be increased, it would be helpful to record the presence and abundance of at least some species and store the data on publicly viewable platform along with changes to show the work is effective. Surveying and recording should form part of the process of enriching biodiversity).*

Changing management may not be popular with all. For example, long grass in areas that have been mown short for years can be interpreted as neglect and attract complaints as well as wildlife.

Utility firms and other agencies regularly approach with a requirement to maintain or install new infrastructure on Portsdown. These can threaten habitats or with suitable mitigation possibly improve the situation, provided suitable advice is given and heeded.

### **Farlington Marshes.**

Chris Lycett, Reserves Officer, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (the Trust) explained that Farlington Marshes (FM) is a peninsular of reclaimed land of approximately 120 hectares in the Northwest of Langstone Harbour. It is quite a rare site for coastal grazing.

It is the most important of the three hubs in the area for overwintering wildfowl and waders. Most birds come to Farlington Marshes to roost undisturbed and forage. Many birds move around the three hubs during the day but all of them come to FM at some point.

There are approximately 5,000 brent geese in Langstone Harbour with 2,000-3,000 on FM just after Christmas.

Although lapwings, avocets and redshanks numbers have declined nationally, FM is a stronghold locally and has the largest number of lapwings chicks in the Solent.

People enjoy visiting the site and that connection through nature is important.

In response to questions, he explained that:

He is part of a small team that manages ten sites in the Solent area. The management of FM is the most intensive as it is a complex site. The nesting sites are protected from ravens and buzzards between late February and June. The main form of management is grazing with 140 cows grazing in mid-summer so that the grass is the optimal length for the brent geese to eat.

Volunteers are mostly the active retired people, so they are trying to recruit younger people.

The birds use a vast array of sites in the harbour, but FM is the key hub as it is the biggest and undisturbed. The brent geese also use the football pitches on Eastern Road which is ideal for them with the open ground and short grass.

Shrub control is ongoing. These are useful for attracting wildlife but must be cut on rotation.

### **Milton Common and Eastney Beach**

The Milton Common management plan and the Milton Common restoration & management framework were published with the agenda.

Peter Roberts, Countryside Officer explained that he is responsible for other sites dotted around the city; a mosaic of habitats: dry land, shingle beach, plus fresh and saltwater areas all on the fringe of urban life. Public safety is the highest priority and many paths have been put in over the last few years.

It is just him and his team of volunteers; the Parks Service has an input but this tends to be limited to amenity areas and access issues. His budget is very limited.

In response to questions, he explained that:

Although having more paths encourages visitors to keep away from vulnerable habitat, education is key.

The sites do suffer from some youth interference.

All the sites around the city would work better if they were linked up to form corridors rather than islands. More could be done to involve private landowners with this.

Engagement with local community groups who would like to plant in an area would be best controlled by a central body liaising with the Countryside Officers. This would ensure that the impact of the proposed projects on existing green sites is understood. Their local knowledge about the flora and fauna could help ensure mistakes are not made. They were not consulted before the trees were planted on Horsea Island which were sourced from Holland rather than local nurseries. *(Post meeting note: they were asked for input about the planting at Horsea Island at the time but were told that no one in the UK could supply the quantity required)*. These could have been infected by Dutch Elm disease.

*(Post meeting note: Dutch Elm is not the best example as it is already endemic in the country. Please note that the importation of any living plants brings with it the chance to introduce plant diseases which could have a detrimental effect on native species).*

Generally, it is better to carry out natural regeneration of plants rather than bring in seeds. The local ecosystem is already adapted to them, and they fit into the food chain.

He feels that they work under the radar and what they do is not flashy.

#### Action

A list of appropriate plants that should be included in wildflower seed mixes used locally will be sent to the panel.

#### **Lakeside North Harbour**

The Lakeside North Harbour (LNH) Phase 1 Ecological Survey and the LNH Wildlife Walks Pocket Map were published with the agenda.



Simon Bateman, Lakeside Asset Manager explained that the site was bought by the council in July 2019 and is an office campus with a hotel and car showroom. There are currently 55 companies leasing office space. The site is designated in the draft Local Plan for employment and potentially, where that is shown to be no longer viable, residential development. It incorporates four acres of land ready for development. It is an asset that creates an income for the council rather than a site for biodiversity. Its USP is that it is good for wellness and community. Its Corporate Social Responsibilities/ Environmental, Social & Governance credentials are important for attracting companies.

The ecological report stated that the site is a mixture of buildings, hardstanding, lake, semi-improved grassland, woodland, scrub, hedgerow and ditches with limited potential for species. The reality is that there is very little wildlife on site mainly rabbits, bees (in ten hives) and geese. There are plans to put in a wildflower meadow, log piles, slatted compost areas, bird and bat boxes, insect hotels and more trees.

The border of the north carpark has hedgerows.

To the East, part of the development site has been bought by Guy Salmon to redevelop for a Land Rover dealership. In mitigation, 4.7 acres at the west end of the site is to be protected nature space, currently grass and scrub, is to be seeded with pale flax, managed and cut once a year.

The lake covers 19 acres and is fed by canals. An Archimedes screw pulls water to the ornamental lake on the north of the site. It is used for irrigation. The Portsmouth & District Angling Society manages the main lake, regularly monitoring salinity levels and fish stock. It is looking to introduce lilies, reeds and underwater cover that the fish can use as refuges.

LNH is a Corporate Member of the Wildlife Trust.

These are some of the many initiatives that are organised:

- Walks in Spring and Autumn.
- Ten beehives which produce 110 pots of honey per year.
- The green waste is mostly composted.
- Signs will be introduced along the nature path informing people what animals they might see on their walk.
- Outdoor gym equipment.
- Vines to be planted in the Winter Garden - a south facing outside area surrounded on 3 sides by buildings.
- Green days where the tenants can join the landscape team in outside projects.
- They took part in the RSPB great big January birdwatch.
- Hedgehog hotels will be set up soon with two provided by the Eastleigh Menshed Group.
- There will be tree planting to mark the Queens Green Canopy Jubilee celebrations in March.
- Presentations by the beekeeper in the schools' half term.

- The landscape contractors, Nurture, to give talks.
- The planting of a wildflower meadow on the Hillside scrubland with walks in May or June where occupiers can learn about the flora and fauna.
- Consideration is being given to applying for the Green Apple, Green Flag and Biodiversity Awards.

He reminded the panel that this is primarily an office campus which provides an income stream for the council and biodiversity is not a priority.

In response to questions from the panel, he explained that

Many initiatives were in place before the council bought the site.

Campuses with blue and green space are in high demand by occupiers.

The day-to-day management is outsourced to Avison Young which has been commissioned to raise the profile of this campus. Nurture is the landscape contractors. It is the biggest single owned campus on the south coast.

It is not part of the public realm so linking it to green sites in the city would be difficult. It needs to be run separately.

Tristan Samuels, Director of Regeneration added that the management of LNH would comply with the council's policies for all Council land. This would not cause a problem as it is already of a high standard that would be an example for others. It is grade A office space. The Civic Offices and Housing Offices are different commercial sites and are in different conditions. It is important that the council works all of its assets wherever possible.

In response to further questions, Mr Bateman explained that this is primarily a development site. The ecological report outlines what species could be introduced but that we are not necessarily looking to do that. The canals are considered too shallow and narrow for otters.

The security of the site is an essential consideration for the occupiers and the gates are locked at night. They are mindful of possible access issues with the travelling community. It is opened for park runs and the Victorious Festival etc.

#### Action

He agreed to look into access for pedestrians from the footpaths where this had been limited by fencing during construction.

In the discussion that followed, members noted that as the site is owned by the council, its management would align to its priorities. The council has declared a climate emergency and is looking at ways to act to mitigate the effects across all its estates.

## **Biodiversity Enhancements of Flood Defence Work in the North and South of the City.**

Guy Mason, Coastal, Highways & Drainage Team Manager and Lyall Cairns, Head of Coastal Partnership explained that:

The Environment Agency is funding the defence work and it is incumbent upon the council to embed biodiversity improvement work in the business plans when submitting funding applications. It is definitely not an add on. There are many aspects to this including tree replacement on a 4:1 basis, saltmarsh replanting, creating more than 60 tidepools at Southsea and North Portsea and the creation of a bird island in Langstone Harbour Harbour.

Although Southsea is not environmentally protected, it is still incumbent on us to minimise the impact of the works. There is a zero to waste target and 10,000s of lorry movements are saved.

There is tension regarding the need to control public access, especially when trying to combine increased public amenity and environmental improvements They are working with PR to ensure they get it right when undertaking this work.

Opportunities to create wildlife corridors across the Solent are considered.

A handout showing the enhancements in the flood defence schemes that support the environment and benefit the local community was circulated to the panel and are attached to these minutes as an appendix.

They are confident in being able to deliver the best scheme in not only Portsmouth but Gosport, Fareham and soon Chichester.

This shows you can deliver an environmentally sound project of any size.

Textured Ecoformliner seawalls create habitat on the face of the seawall and is funded by the Environment Agency and the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee.

In response to questions from the panel, the following points were clarified:

Bee posts are being integrated into the landscape and experts are consulted to ensure that the appropriate maintenance regime is in place.

It is important to note that enhancement of the public realm is a cost met by the Capital Budget but most ongoing maintenance is revenue cost.

Environmental improvements elsewhere have been carried out including putting in drainage along the football pitches.

The feedback from residents has been very positive with 30,000 people on social media saying the works were fantastic.

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified.

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Councillor Lee Mason  
Chair