

## **Report of site visit of the TEC scrutiny panel on the use of pesticides and herbicides held on Friday 14 July 2023**

### **1. Introductions**

- 1.1. The site visit was attended by Cllr Judith Smyth (Panel Chair), Jane Di Dino, Local Democracy Officer, Phil Bentley, Head of Estates, Pete Briant (Estates Operations Supervisor), David Emmett, Head of Waste Management Services.
- 1.2. Apologies were given by Cllr Simon Bosher, Cllr Charlotte Gerada, Cllr Mark Jeffries, Cllr Jason Fazackarley and Cllr Chris Dike.
- 1.3. The purpose of the site visit was to see the effect of the reduction of the use of pesticides and herbicides on the appearance and management of the Buckland estate where the Housing Estates team have been changing how they work for three years. The Buckland approach is now being rolled out across other PCC estates although the use of pesticides and herbicides has already been implemented across the city.
- 1.4. The context for the reduction of the use of pesticides and herbicides is a wider policy to improve biodiversity by planting trees, reducing paved areas, planting 'wild' meadows, small trees, grass, sustainable flower beds, existing planters and 'edges' across housing estates.

### **2. Summary findings**

- 2.1. Despite an increase in green areas across Buckland, the Estates team has managed to reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides to practically zero in the last two to three years.
  - 2.2. The anticipated increases in injuries to estates team members has not materialised because of the replacement of heavy equipment and pesticides / herbicides with lighter electric trimmers and scrapers which are used on an as needed basis by the team. In addition, cleaning staff have scrapers to use when a plant grows too big.
  - 2.3. Leaving some mosses and plants on the edges of paths has not resulted in resident complaints and looks fine.
  - 2.4. New planting has been achieved without the use of pesticides and herbicides. Because of the choice of plants maintenance is minimal and costs have been contained.
  - 2.5. So called 'wild meadows' are a challenge especially where grass cuttings are used to mulch the area. Mulching with cut grass is now much reduced. A single dose of herbicide (recommended by City landscape architects) was used to kill grass that was overwhelming other plants (Lake Rd meadow) and may be needed in the future. This raises the question of alternative treatments for 'wild meadows', the future of 'wild' meadows without herbicides and the desirability of including 'wild' meadows in landscape schemes if they deteriorate naturally so fast. In other words, is it worth a short-term exemption to the no herbicide policy for the sake of a few 'wild' meadows?
3. The walking route around Buckland estate covered Buckland Path, Barrington House, Seymour Close, Buckland Park, Arnaud Close and Hanway Road. We also saw the Buckland Badge on Lake Road.



4. Description of what we saw and some of the discussions we had.
  - 4.1. Formerly paved areas (some unused drying courts) wholly or partly planted with grass, small trees and or sustainable planting.
  - 4.2. 80 new trees in the park. It was noted that the trees, planted 18 months ago, were now mostly established but watering in new trees and planting has been a challenge, a new bowser was acquired, a few trees lost. The park is popular and well used.
  - 4.3. Vandalism is infrequent since CCTV was installed; although plants and are sometimes stolen and trees killed and damaged as with other places in the city.
  - 4.4. Plants between pathways and walls including climbing plants up the outside of shared stairways, pillars (with a view to joining over bridges between flats above (we were advised to visit the California Blocks, climbing plants are being used successfully instead of expensive green walls).
  - 4.5. We noted that the estates team was some 300 people and that they were on every site between every 21 and 28 days and able to use initiative about work priorities. Winter work included longer term projects such as pruning and clearing moss. Teams have enjoyed planting and maintaining new flower beds.
  - 4.6. The only formal planting area is on Lake Rd. It is the city crest in purple petunias and yellow marigolds. This was planted and maintained without any pesticides or herbicides. It is well liked by residents, passers-by and the estates team. It requires a bit more maintenance and twice a year replanting.
  - 4.7. We discussed whether or not residents could be encouraged not to use pesticides and herbicides in their own gardens and indeed whether they could be encouraged to de-pave and plant more in small front gardens and back gardens. We learned that this was not in the remit of the Estates team and would rely on conversations between housing managers and perhaps changes in tenancy agreements.
  - 4.8. We considered the financial cost of not using pesticides and herbicides and were reassured by the team that there was not an additional cost.
  - 4.9. We learned that de-paving and the creation of new grass and planting areas required a capital sum in most cases (for digging out, borders, buying plants and trees). An example was given of a cost of £200,000 for creating a new wedged shaped planting area between a path and a building. These can be paid for out of HRA but cannot be done all at once.

#### Conclusion

5. It was evident to the Chair of the panel that the estate had been vastly improved by the new approach during the last three years and she wants to place on record the deep gratitude she has for the whole team. This project is one where a strong commitment to improving the environment, an in-house team offering continuity, experience and familiarity with local residents together with a very pragmatic and opportunist approach on the ground has been much more effective than the often used over bureaucratic process of agreeing a strategy and detailed development plan and consulting on it wholesale before starting work incrementally. We noted that this is an approach that plays to the strengths of a good in-house team and is very hard to specify in sufficient detail to tender out successfully.

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Cllr Judith Smyth  
Chair of the TECS panel  
14 July 2023