

17 DECEMBER 2019

REPORT TITLE	POLLINATORS ACTION PLAN AND GRASS VERGE POLLINATORS MAINTENANCE
REPORT OF	NICKI BUTTERWORTH, DIRECTOR OF DELIVERY SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

This report details a proposed Pollinators Action Plan for Wirral and recommends its approval. A Pollinators Action Plan will provide guidance to the Council regarding our management of Parks, Countryside and Highways to benefit pollinators.

RECOMMENDATION

To approve the adoption of a Pollinators Action Plan for Wirral.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 National charity Plantlife have published guidance on management of road verges for the benefit of pollinators, see Background Documents. This puts forward compelling arguments for the benefits that pollinator focused management can bring for biodiversity:

“When managed well, road verges, whether rural or urban and whether on major or minor roads, can sustain an astonishing amount of wildlife: more pollinators are found on well-managed verges than in the neighbouring countryside and nearly 45% of our total flora is found on verges.”

- 1.2 A Pollinators Action Plan formalises the Council’s commitment and interest in following best practice in Wirral’s Parks, Countryside and Highways to benefit pollinators.

- 1.3 Friends of the Earth, an international environmental charity recommends all Local Authorities to develop a Pollinators Action Plan:

“Local authorities with their wide ranging responsibilities, services and land holdings are in a unique position to help safeguard our native pollinators. Significant opportunities exist in local authority work, including in their role in local planning and as managers of public green space and green infrastructure, and land such as schools, roadside verges and roundabouts.”

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 For the Council not to adopt a Pollinators Action Plan. This option would carry no resource cost to the Council; however it would also result in none of the benefits of a Pollinators Action Plan being realised.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The creation of a draft Pollinators Action Plan arose from work with the Steering Group of the Parks & Countryside Partnership and Performance Board in 2018.

- 3.2 A member of the Steering Group commented on the Council’s grass cutting regime on Lever Causeway and that this had resulted in umbellifers on the grass verges being cut whilst in flower.

- 3.3 This grass cutting regime was in place to maintain lines of sight, this issue has now been resolved and the grass cutting timings changed so that cuts are not undertaken whilst umbellifers are in flower.

- 3.4 A working group involving the Friends of Wirral Parks Forum, Wirral Wildlife and other stakeholders was convened with the Senior Manager Wirral Parks, Coast and Countryside.

- 3.5 The draft resulting from this work was updated in November 2019, the resulting Pollinators Action Plan can be seen in Appendix 1.

- 3.6 At full Council on the 15th July 2019 a notice of motion “Verges and Pollinators” was passed. This detailed the following:

“Council notes the public interest in, and appreciation of, the scheme in Rotherham where the main Ring Road has, for some years, had areas planted with native wildflowers.

As these have created an attractive visual environment and encouraged pollinators Council requests Cabinet to instruct officers to:

a) report in detail on such a scheme, the cost of introduction and potential maintenance

b) offer advice on suitable areas for similar planting in Wirral

c) consider an area for an initial trial scheme in Wirral

d) draw up proposals for consultation regarding further areas where this could be introduced; and

present this report for consideration by the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee with a timetable that might enable a trial scheme to commence in 2020.

In the meantime, the Council requests the Cabinet to ensure that officers work proactively with residents who wish to create wildflower meadows on council-owned land in appropriate locations.”

3.7 As detailed in the Notice of Motion a report was prepared by Officers and presented at Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee 28th November 2019.

3.8 Trial sites were identified from liaison with Wirral Wildlife a group of Cheshire Wildlife Trust. From this short list Lever Causeway and the junction of Plymyard Avenue and Eastham Rake were selected as favourable sites to pilot. In the case of Lever Causeway this refers to the grass cutting regime.

3.9 At this meeting members of the committee resolved that the contents of the report to provide guidance on future work regarding pollinator verges be noted.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The total cost of trialling sites for pollinator planting would be approximately £952.80. This amount is for the trial only.

4.2 The actions listed in the Pollinators Action Plan (Appendix 1) principally concern doing management differently and making management decisions which benefit pollinators. This does not necessarily involve additional finance use but different finance use.

4.3 It is anticipated there will be no significant costs arising from this work associated with the initial trial.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no legal implications of this work.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS

6.1 Additional Officer time will be required to establish the pollinator verges at the junction Plymyard Avenue and Eastham Rake, 18 hours work by two labourers would be required.

6.2 The actions listed in the Pollinators Action Plan (Appendix 1) principally concern doing management differently and making management decisions which benefit pollinators. This does not necessarily involve additional resource use but different resource use.

6.3 There are therefore unlikely to be any significant resource costs arising from this work.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 That the Pollinators Action Plan is unsuccessful in delivering benefits for pollinators and wildlife.

7.2 The Pollinators Action Plan will be reviewed through its five-year lifespan, barriers and challenges identified can therefore be addressed.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 Continued engagement will be undertaken with Friends Groups, Wirral Wildlife, and the Parks Partnership Board. Wirral View would be utilised to share details of the Pollinators Action Plan and the planned trials, and to give Residents the contact details of how and where to comment on the proposal.

8.2 Mechanisms can be created for Residents and Members to suggest sites for future pollinator verges in line with the “Verges and Pollinators” motion. We need to first assess the success, efficiency and impact of the establishment process as described above in the two trial sites proposed.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None because there is no relevance to equality.

9.2 Future actions arising from this work may require an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) an EIA will be undertaken at a future date if required and along with other appropriate considerations.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The adoption of the Pollinators Action Plan will result in mowing and pesticide use being reviewed, which in turn may recommend a reduction in either or both. Any resulting reduction in mowing or pesticide use will reduce emissions of CO₂. The implementation of the Pollinators Action Plan will enhance biodiversity.

10.2 The recommendations contained within this report are expected to have no impact on emissions of CO₂.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Notice of Motion Pollinators and Verges, Full Council, 15th July 2019, Page 24

<https://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/g7928/Printed%20minutes%2015th-Jul-2019%2018.00%20Council.pdf?T=1>

Friends of the Earth & Buglife, Helping Pollinators Locally, developing a local Pollinator Action Plan or Strategy

<https://cdn.friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/Helping%20pollinators%20locally.pdf>

Plantlife, Managing grassland road verges, a best practice guide

https://www.plantlife.org.uk/application/files/3315/7063/5411/Managing_grassland_road_verges_Singles.pdf

Report to Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 28th November 2019

<https://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50063320/Environment%20OSC%2028.11.19%20Pollinator%20Verges%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Full Council	15 th July 2019
Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee	28 th November 2019

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Wirral Pollinators Action Plan, November 2019

Wirral Council Pollinator Action Plan

November 2019

Introduction

Many bees, hoverflies, moths, beetles, butterflies and other pollinating insects are declining (DEFRA, 2014). Without them, many crops would fail and the attractive nature of public parks and coastal and countryside sites would be adversely affected, because they are essential to pollinate wild plants and crops. Pollinators are a vital component of our ecosystems and are valuable in their own right for their biodiversity value. The importance of Pollinators is further recognised in the government's 25 Year Environment Plan published in 2018 (HM Government, 2018).

The creation of this Pollinator Action Plan was driven by the work of the Steering Group of the Parks & Countryside Partnership and Performance Board. It has been drafted with input from a stakeholder group comprised of members of the Parks & Countryside Partnership and Performance Board.

Action is required at both a national and local level to help pollinators, both for the benefits they provide to people and also to help these species survive.

Wirral Council has a part to play in helping pollinators on its own land, this policy action plan sets out the actions we will take to support pollinators. As part of the policy, Wirral Council will also encourage other land owners on the Wirral to consider what they can do to support bees and other pollinator species.

Context

This policy action plan is guided by the National Pollinator Strategy (DEFRA, 2014). We are living through a global climate emergency, Wirral Council passed a motion declaring a climate emergency in July 2019. As part of this declaration a climate emergency action

plan was formed which included a call for a policy for encouraging pollinators and wildflowers along hedges and verges. This Pollinator Action Plan forms this response.

Also in July 2019 a Pollinator Verges motion was passed by Council this motion called for the Council to investigate maintenance of grass road verges for wildflowers and pollinators. It called for:

- a) report in detail on such a scheme, the cost of introduction and potential maintenance
- b) offer advice on suitable areas for similar planting in Wirral
- c) consider an area for an initial trial scheme in Wirral
- d) draw up proposals for consultation regarding further areas where this could be introduced

This Pollinator Action Plan also details the Council’s response to this motion
 Linked into the Pollinator Verges motion a third motion in July 2019 Glyphosate Free Wirral also detailed how the Council should explore alternatives to glyphosate, a herbicide. As part of our response to this motion we are trialling a 12 month period of no glyphosate use in Parks, Playgrounds and Cemeteries, using manual methods instead. This will then be reviewed after 12 months to determine the impact of the trial by appropriate Parks officer with support from Parks Partnership Board .

Actions

	Actions	Lead/partners	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
1	Formally adopt this policy action plan and review progress annually	Wirral Parks Partnership Performance board and Cabinet Lead for	Drafted action plan has been used as a guide – for example in the response to the	The Pollinator Action Plan is on the Forward Plan to be adopted	Review Progress	Review Progress	Review Progress & consider next 5 years

		Environment and Climate Change	Notice of Motion re pollinator verges.	February 2020.			
2	Adopt Plantlife's Managing Grassland Road Verges Guidelines . Identify existing species-rich areas and review mowing regimes at all sites annually to reduce negative impact on pollinators	Wirral Council in partnership with Wirral Wildlife	Sites for potentially pollinator friendly changes in mowing frequency have been received from Wirral Wildlife. After discussion with Rights of Way Officer, adjustment now made to Lever Causeway summer verge mowing to avoid cutting of umbellifers in flower	Review & monitor	Review & monitor	Review & monitor	Review & monitor
3	Ensure all new plantings are good for pollinators	Wirral Council	Selection of plants for the following new planting	Officers will continue to work in recommended plants	Officers will continue to work in recommended plants	Officers will continue to work in recommended plants	Officers will continue to work in recommended plants

<p>as recommended by RHS</p>		<p>schemes in 2019 have used pollinator friendly species</p> <p>Victoria Park – in filling shrub bed: <i>Ceanothus</i>, <i>Cornus</i>, <i>Escallonia</i> and <i>Weigela</i>.</p> <p>Landican Cemetery Baby Garden – <i>Lavandula</i> 'Munstead', <i>Nepeta x faassenii</i>, <i>Thymus vulgaris</i>, <i>Myosotis sylvatica</i>, <i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>.</p> <p>Ashton Park – <i>Hebe</i> 'Great Orme'</p>	<p>into planting schemes throughout the Borough.</p>			
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			Wallasey Village roundabout - Lavandula 'Munstead'				
4	Review use of herbicides and pesticides at a site specific level each year to reduce negative impact on pollinators	Wirral Council with Wirral Wildlife	Plants purchased for use in Parks & Countryside sites are selected to be free of neonicotinoids. Use of Glyphosate in Parks & Countryside sites now limited to treatment of invasive species in 12 month trial from December 2019	Review effects of 12 month no glyphosate trial and determine long term future action	√	√	√
5	Develop and implement a programme	Wirral Council	Plan	Wirral Lowland Heaths Seminar in March	Do	Do	Do

	e of pollinator events and activities at appropriate WBC Parks, Coast & Countryside Sites			2020 will highlight benefits of the Borough's lowland heaths for pollinators			
6	Promote 'Bee Friendly'/B ees Needs to all departments and partners including allotment holders and communities	Wirral Council in partnership with Wirral Wildlife and New Ferry Butterfly Park	Plan	Do	Do	Do	Do

References

DEFRA (2014) *The National Pollinators Strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England*

HM Government. (2018). *A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment*.

Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>