



ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 30 November 2022

REPORT TITLE:	POLLINATOR STRATEGY
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee approved the Council's Environment & Climate Emergency Policy in March 2021 since then officers have been putting arrangements in place and taking action, to progress the Policy's objectives and commitments.

This report seeks the approval and endorsement of the Wirral Pollinator Strategy, which supports the Council's biodiversity commitment within the policy, 'Transforming our Open Spaces and Enhancing Biodiversity'. This strategy has been developed to raise awareness of the plight of pollinators and to ensure the Council and its local residents, businesses and landowners are provided with information to help us all protect and increase our pollinator populations.

Wirral Council is committed to helping to conserve the UK's pollinators by ensuring the council considers the needs of pollinators in the delivery of its duties and activities. This strategy is designed to ensure the needs of pollinators are enshrined across the breadth of Council work and to increase awareness of pollinators across our local community.

This report is a key decision and affects all wards of the borough.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee is recommended to approve the Wirral Pollinator Strategy.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The Council recognises the importance of the natural environment and the role that it can play in tackling climate change. This Committee participated in the development of the Environment & Climate Emergency Policy and set the commitments the Council should make in response to the Council's 2019 declaration of an environment and climate emergency. When approving the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy, Committee confirmed its commitment to Biodiversity.
- 1.2 Insect pollinator species have experienced national declines
- Half of our 27 bumblebee species are in decline
 - Three of these bumblebee species have already gone extinct
 - Two-thirds of our moths are in long term decline.
 - Across Europe 38% of bee and hoverfly species are in decline
 - 71% of our butterflies are in decline
 - Some studies show that since 1970, flying insect biomass has reduced by possibly three-quarters, so we may only have a quarter as many flying insects as 50 years ago.
- 1.3 The most significant factors leading to the decline in pollinator numbers include:
- Habitat loss – the loss and degradation of habitats which provide food, shelter, and nesting sites for pollinators. The loss of wildflower-rich grasslands is one of the most important issues. Over 3 million hectares of these habitats have been lost in England alone since the 1930s, the loss being attributed to more intensive farming and urban/industrial development.
 - Pesticides – the use of pesticides is having harmful effects on pollinators including honeybees, wild bees, and butterflies. Wider effects throughout ecosystems are also of concern and pesticides have been implicated in other declines such as farmland birds and soil organisms.
 - Climate Change – long term changes can deprive pollinators of food supplies at times when they need them, increase their exposure to parasites and diseases, or change habitats so that they are no longer suitable.
- 1.4 The Wirral Pollinator Strategy seeks to address the decline in pollinators and supports Wirral Councils commitment to addressing the Climate Emergency. In particular this strategy recognises the importance of the natural environment and biodiversity and seeks to deliver the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Statement (2020) in particular in relation to 'Biodiversity – Transforming our open spaces and enhancing biodiversity'. As such, if approved, the Wirral Pollinator Strategy will sit alongside the Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy (2020-2030) and the two together will seek to increase biodiversity locally.
- 1.5 The Wirral Pollinator Strategy sets out five broad aims that the Council and its partners will work together to deliver:
1. Ensure the needs of pollinators are represented in local plans, policy, and guidance for regeneration and economic development.
 2. Protect, increase, and enhance the amount of pollinator habitat in Wirral to prevent extinctions and improve the status of any locally threatened species
 3. Increase awareness of pollinators and their habitat needs across local residents,

- community and voluntary groups, businesses, and other landowners
4. Increase the contribution to pollinator conservation of all land under the ownership of, or managed by the Council
 5. Improve our knowledge and understanding of pollinators in our local area

1.6 The Wirral Pollinator Strategy has been developed to raise awareness of the plight of pollinators and to ensure the Council and its local residents, businesses and landowners are provided with information to help us all protect and increase our pollinator populations. This strategy is designed to ensure the needs of pollinators are enshrined across the breadth of Council work and to increase awareness of pollinators across our local community.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

2.1 This report introduces the Wirral Pollinator Strategy which is a part of the response to increasing biodiversity in the approved Environment & Climate Emergency Policy. The Council has declared an environment and climate emergency, recognising the urgent need for action to address and plan for the changes to the environment and climate. Therefore, the alternative of not making the necessary environment and biodiversity interventions would not address the Council's declared emergency.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 The Council has been developing its support for pollinators for some time with Parks & Countryside Services implementing an initial action plan in 2018, to review established mowing regimes and consider adopting the practices of 'Plantlife's Road Verge and Wildlife Management Guidelines.'

3.2 In 2019, Council resolved to develop its support of pollinators through a series of pollinator pilot sites across the borough. The two initial pilot sites identified were grass verges at the corner of Plymyard Avenue and Eastham Rake.

3.3 In Spring 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic and full lockdown resulted in a delay in starting the grass cutting season of approximately 8 weeks. This meant that the grass across the borough had been allowed to grow much longer than in previous years, which in turn enabled certain native wildflowers to grow and prosper in the unmaintained verges. This unexpected outcome of the lockdown generated a lot of positive public feedback, people wanted to see an expansion of rewilded areas to enhance wildlife and supported a reduction in grass cutting. As a result, people were encouraged to send in requests for locations to be considered for inclusion in an expanded number of sites for reduced maintenance.

3.4 A number of initiatives that have been implemented to date including: -

- Rewilding on several amenity greenspaces and highway grass verges.
- A reduction in the frequency of grass maintenance on all general grass areas in parks and public open spaces, including 'No Mow May'.
- The designation of some highway verges as Pollinator sites, with a management plan to promote wildflower growth.
- Developed a pilot 'Bee Bus Shelter' in order to introduce Pollinators into urban areas, working in partnership with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

These initiatives have been intended to reduce the amount of disturbance to habitats which promote pollinators, provide opportunities for amenity greenspaces to be used in different ways to support re-wilding and reduce the cost of maintaining these areas.

- 3.5 Wirral Council has had success in promoting pollinators being recognised in 2020 for its work in this area with a Bees' Needs Champions Awards for the Meadow Restoration Project at Wirral Country Park. Bees play a part in every aspect of the ecosystem, they support the growth of trees, flowers, and other plants, which serve as food and shelters for creatures large and small, Bees contribute to complex, interconnected ecosystems that allow a diverse number of different species to co-exist.
- 3.6 The Wirral Pollinator Strategy seeks to build upon these initiatives and incorporate the feedback received from a range of consultations with members, partners, and residents to provide a holistic response to support our pollinators. The public consultation highlighted strong support for: -
- Increasing the number of areas that support pollinators and consider all of its land and assets when thinking about pollinators (including buildings, other structures and urban spaces).
 - reduce the impact, where possible, of pesticides on pollinators
 - needs to do more to educate people on the importance of pollinators, reflecting the feeling from residents that they needed more information on what they could do in their local area to help increase and support pollinators.
 - Involving more volunteer groups and supporting them in pollinator conservation work
 - Monitoring the number of pollinators to track changes to pollinator populations
 - Considering pollinators and their habitats in all future planning (new developments, Local Plan, new policies).

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no revenue implications arising from this report, many of the actions put forward to deliver this strategy may be achieved at low or no cost. Effectively engaging with residents, Friends Groups and other volunteers can raise awareness and deliver upon a wide range of actions and these opportunities do need to be maximised.
- 4.2 However, there are some aspects of this strategy that will require financing for instance: -
- The purchase of updated flail mower machinery to manage longer grass land (for which Capital has already been agreed),
 - The provision of seeds and plants and clearing areas in order to develop further Pollinator sites or allotments, and
 - In developing or using different approaches to weed control. The use of Glyphosate continues to be the cheapest form of weed control with alternatives costing significantly more to adopt.
- 4.3 Wirral Council is committed to addressing the Climate Emergency and as a part of this increasing Biodiversity. To deliver upon this strategy, where additional funds may be required, Wirral Council will seek support from National Initiatives in order to

obtain grant funding and where necessary seek additional support from Council funds such as the Climate Emergency Budget or Capital in order to deliver upon the highest priority objectives and actions of this strategy.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Council has a statutory duty to keep roadside verges cut to a reasonable height to maintain sightlines for road users.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 The Council's biodiversity commitments do have resource implications and will require changing work practices, new skills and competencies for the workforce and investment in new machinery to address these. It is also essential that the Council delivers an effective public awareness campaign to ensure that residents understand the changes that are occurring to their local environment and how they can contribute and get involved. Community participation in the initiatives and campaigns that will drive biodiversity is essential. All the actions involved in promoting biodiversity require public involvement and ownership to succeed.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 There is a risk that too long grass will hinder sightlines for vehicles along the road network. This risk is mitigated against by careful site selection and by cutting edge borders surrounding long grass.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 Changes to the Wirral grass maintenance and the introduction of re-wilding and pollinator areas formed a part of Wirral Council's budget for 2021/22, consultation was undertaken between November 2020 and January 2021. These proposals were supported by residents when balanced against other reductions in services.

8.2 Wirral Council's website detailed the new grass maintenance regime, including 'No Mow May'. Areas put forward for re-wilding or pollinator designation were also published. Through this web page residents were able to raise issues with the sites selected. In addition, elected members have been very active during 2021/22 in putting forward alternative areas for consideration. These schemes were also featured in Wirral View.

8.3 An Operational Review of the implementation of the 2021/22 Pollinator Pilots was presented to the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee for comment on 20th January 2022.

8.4 A joint Wirral Council / Wirral Wildlife workshop was held on 14 February 2022 with Members of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee to discuss Wirral Council's approach to Pollinators to inform the initial development of this strategy.

8.5 Further consultation was held with all elected members being invited to attend Pollinator Strategy Ward meetings with officers from Parks & Countryside in July

2022 to take part in the consultation and to shape both this strategy and to review both past and proposed future Re-Wilding & Pollinator sites.

- 8.6 Public consultation was undertaken on the development of the Wirral Pollinator Strategy (September 2022) via a survey on the 'Have Your Say' webpage and paper copies were available upon request. A copy of the results of the Survey are provided as an Appendix to this report.
- 8.7 Briefly in relation to the eight questions posed the following responses were received: -
- 81.4% of respondents strongly agreed that 'the council should increase the number of areas that support pollinators to thrive', and 7.6% strongly disagreed.
 - 85.3% strongly agreed that 'the council should reduce the impact, where possible, of pesticides on pollinators. 5.9% strongly disagreed.
 - 67.8 % feel aware of what they can do in their local area to help increase and support pollinators. 11.7% do not feel aware.
 - 62.4% strongly agree that 'the council needs to do more to educate people on the importance of pollinators. In total, 87.1% agreed and 4.7% disagreed.
 - 94.1% of respondents feel aware of what they can do in their local area to help increase and support pollinators. However, 3.5% do not feel aware.
 - 64% strongly agree that 'The council should look to involve more volunteer groups and support them in the pollinator conservation work', 3.5% strongly disagree.
 - 87.0% believe 'the council should monitor the number of pollinators to track changes to pollinator populations. However, 5.9% strongly disagreed, and 0.6% disagreed.
 - 95.8% of respondents agreed that 'the council should consider pollinators and their habitats in all future planning', with 3.5% disagreement.
- 8.8 When asked if there was anything else that the respondents would like to tell us about pollinators, the most common category of response was that there was a need for education about pollinators. Respondents also believed the council should create an effective plan for pollinators to thrive and that the council should take a holistic view when creating a Pollinator Strategy, for it to be a success.
- 8.9 When asked to provide any concerns regarding the increase of pollinators, 56% did not have any concerns. However, some were concerned that some maintenance would still be needed. 4.5% of respondents believed that a Pollinator Strategy alone is not enough, and that more action should be taken to benefit the environment due to its importance. However, another concern was that a Pollinator Strategy may be misinterpreted by the public and lead to opposition from residents. There was also a concern that without proper planning, a Pollinator Strategy may be ineffective.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken, as a part of the development of the Wirral Pollinator Strategy and details the potential positive and negative impacts arising. Through working closely with residents and elected members Wirral Council has been able to mitigate many of the negative impacts from individual schemes, such as rewilding. This has been achieved by swapping rewilding areas, for a similar size area of land within the same Ward or developing mown walkways

and edge mowing as required. Wirral Council has also worked with residents who wish to maintain amenity greenspace themselves.

- 9.2 The Equality Impact Assessment is available via this link:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Since the 1930's the UK has lost 97% of its ancient wildflower meadows. Roadside verges in the UK support around 700 species of wildflowers. Wildflowers provide a vital habitat for pollinator species such as bees, butterflies, moths, and other insects. Not only do flowering plants provide nectar and pollen for declining pollinator species (especially bees), but wildflowers also provide an important food source and refuge for many other insects. For instance, Dandelions are in the top five of road verge wildflower species that support the highest number of invertebrates, supporting 107 species.
- 10.2 The Council's Environment & Climate Emergency Policy Statement sets out the Council's commitment to enhancing biodiversity, which will have a positive impact on the environment. The Policy Statement sets out the tangible carbon offset and sequestration benefits from the delivery of strategies such as the Wirral Pollinator Strategy.
- 10.3 By utilising Wirral's roadside verges and green spaces Wirral council can provide an environment in which a diverse range of plant species to thrive which provide habitats for pollinator species. This in turn which in support all wildlife from the bottom to the top of food chain.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Wirral is facing stark economic, social and health inequalities. The Wirral Plan is committed to addressing this. With Community Wealth Building at its heart, the Wirral Plan sets out how to tackle this and makes a major contribution to improving the economic, social and health outcomes of the borough.
- 11.2 Objective 2 of the Community Wealth Building Strategy 2020-2025 is to Create a Generative Economy. Which is '*An economy with a built-in tendency to be to be socially fair and ecologically stable.*' The Wirral Pollinator Strategy seeks to increase the wildlife value of roadside verges, parks, and open spaces, to provide food, shelter, and nesting sites for pollinator species in addition to supporting a wider range of wildlife including plants, mammals, and birds. The increase in biodiversity will contribute to the ecological stability and the social and environmental wellbeing of Wirral.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Wirral Pollinator Strategy

Appendix B – Results of Public Consultation on the Wirral Pollinator Strategy

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The National Pollinator Strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England (November 2014) - The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK

Supporting document to the National Pollinator Strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England (November 2014) - The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK

National Pollinator Strategy: Implementation Plan (November 2015) - The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK

National Pollinator Strategy: Implementation Plan, 2018-2021 (December 2018) - The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK

National Pollinator Strategy: for bees and other pollinators in England - Evidence statements and Summary of Evidence 'Management and Drivers of Change of Pollinating Insects and Pollination Services (January 2019) – The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK

The good verge guide: a different approach to managing our waysides and verges (2016) Plantlife

Road Verges and their potential for pollinators: A review of costs, benefits, and management options (2019) Buglife

Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Statement (March 2021) – Wirral Council

Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy (2020-2030) – Wirral Council

Road, Verge and Wildlife Management Guidelines (2019) - Plantlife

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee in accordance with Sections A, B and E of its Terms of Reference;

(a) in co-ordinating the response to cross-cutting sustainability issues such as reducing carbon emissions, air quality issues, climate change response, improving resource efficiency and developing sustainable energy;

(b) in relation to all highways matters and as highway authority, street authority, bridge authority, including but not limited to public open spaces, street furniture on the highway and open spaces or parts of open spaces immediately adjacent to the highway;

(e) in respect of parks, open spaces, countryside management, allotments, playgrounds and cemeteries, including arboricultural, gardening and warden services.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Environment, Climate Emergency & Transport Committee Operational Evaluation – Pollinator Pilot	15th November 2021
Environment, Climate Emergency & Transport Committee Progress update on Biodiversity actions	14th June 2021
Environment, Climate Emergency & Transport Committee Environment & Climate Emergency Policy	16th March 2021
Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee Update of Pollinators Action Plan	28th November 2019
Full Council Notice of Motion on Pollinators	15th July 2019