

Report Title:	Biodiversity Implementation Programme
Contains Confidential or Exempt Information?	No - Part I
Member reporting:	Councillor Stimson, Lead Member for Environmental Services, Climate Change, Sustainability and Culture.
Meeting and Date:	Cabinet - 31 October 2019
Responsible Officer(s):	Hilary Hall, Director of Adults, Health and Commissioning and Ben Smith, Head of Commissioning-Infrastructure
Wards affected:	All

REPORT SUMMARY

1. This report sets out how the Council will deliver changes to the way in which it manages highway verges, parks, and open spaces in order to increase the biodiversity value of these areas. This follows unanimous support for the biodiversity motion at the council meeting on 23 July 2019:
2. The initial implementation of the programme will result in a small number of pilot projects commencing in 2019, with a thorough review of mowing/cutting regimes for highway verges, parks and open spaces to be undertaken in advance of the 2020 growing season. The cost of the pilot projects is proposed to be met from an initial £15,000 S106 or CIL budget. It is anticipated that adjustments to mowing/cutting frequencies and specifications from 2020 onwards will lead to the programme being cost neutral.
3. Following this initial implementation, further consideration will be given to the resourcing and implementation of wider biodiversity initiatives.

1. DETAILS OF RECOMMENDATION(S)

RECOMMENDATION: That Cabinet notes the report and:

- i) Approves the biodiversity schemes set out in this report, including initial wildflower planting works in 2019/20, and a review of and amendments to the mowing regimes for highway verges, parks and open spaces starting from the 2020 growing season
- ii) Requests use of £15,000 of S106 or CIL monies for progressing with the pilot biodiversity schemes in 2019/20

2. REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S) AND OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Options Table 1: Options arising from this report

Option	Comments
<p>Manage our highway verges, parks and open spaces in such a way as to increase their value for biodiversity.</p> <p>This is the recommended option</p>	This is consistent with the motion passed by Council on 23 rd July 2019, and also the Council's declaration of an environmental and climate emergency at its meeting on 25 th June 2019.
<p>Do nothing (i.e. continue with current management arrangements for highway verges, parks and open spaces).</p> <p>This is not recommended.</p>	This would be inconsistent with the motion and declaration referred to above.

- 2.1 At its meeting on 23rd July 2019, Council unanimously passed the following motion:

That this Council, in the interests of encouraging biodiversity, and with input from ward councillors, agrees to:

- i) *Less frequent mowing of verges to encourage wildlife friendly grasses and flowers and of parks and open spaces to encourage biodiversity, whilst being cognisant of health and safety issues insofar as traffic is concerned*
- ii) *The introduction of wildflowers to cheer up targeted barren sites within the Borough*
- iii) *The introduction of drought resistant insect friendly plants in key roadside areas*

- 2.2 The Royal Borough already has a strong commitment to conservation and biodiversity, managing 69 parks and open spaces, Local Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites, and Wildlife Areas. The total area of land actively managed for conservation is approximately 380 acres, including recently acquired land at Thriftwood/Ockwells Park, Battlemead Common, and Shurlock Road.

- 2.3 The current grounds maintenance contract for parks and open spaces with Tivoli Services already includes a number of areas which are managed as conservation grass. However, it is proposed that a thorough review of cutting frequencies and specifications is undertaken, in discussion with Tivoli, in preparation for the 2020 growing season.

- 2.4 The Council's current mowing/cutting regimes for highway verges are set out in the Highways Maintenance Management Plan (HMMP), and together with the mowing/cutting regimes for parks and open spaces, these standards are reflected in the specifications contained in the council's grounds maintenance contract with Tivoli.

- 2.5 The current verge maintenance regimes set out in the HMMP and in the grounds maintenance contract are designed to ensure that grass and other vegetation is cut for safety purposes, in order to maintain visibility for highway

users, to prevent the obstruction of sightlines and traffic signs, and to ensure that road and footway widths are not reduced by overgrowing vegetation.

- 2.6 Some areas of verge are already managed to encourage the growth and survival of local flora and fauna, and this is included within the HMMP and the grounds maintenance contract. However, it is proposed that a thorough review of cutting frequencies and specifications is undertaken, in discussion with Tivoli, in preparation for the 2020 growing season. Appropriate roadside signage will be displayed in relevant areas to explain the reasons why verges are being managed in this way.
- 2.7 Additionally, a small number of pilot sites on highway verges have been identified across the borough, where wildflower planting projects can be commenced in 2019 to be funded from a £15,000 budget set aside for 2019/20.
- 2.8 The proposals in this report represent the initial implementation of a programme to support delivery of the council's biodiversity commitment. The Royal Borough will continue to work with our contractors and partners in managing and monitoring biodiversity within the borough, including Tivoli (in relation to the grounds maintenance contract) and the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC), Berks, Bucks and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT), Wild Maidenhead (WM), Wild Cookham (WC).

3. KEY IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The key implications are set out in table 2.

Table 2: Key Implications

Outcome	Unmet	Met	Exceeded	Significantly Exceeded	Date of delivery
Increase in the number of verges and parks and open spaces where biodiversity is encouraged	Less than 5 sites	5 – 10 sites	More than 10 sites	N/A	31 March 2021

4. FINANCIAL DETAILS / VALUE FOR MONEY

- 4.1 Funding for the mowing and maintenance of highway verges and parks and open spaces is included within the grounds maintenance contract. In order to deliver the pilot projects outlined in this report, use of S106 or CIL monies of £15,000 will be required.
- 4.2

Table 3: Financial Impact of report's recommendations

REVENUE COSTS	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Additional total	£15,000	£0	£0
Reduction	£0	£0	£0
Net Impact	£15,000	£0	£0

CAPITAL COSTS	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Additional total	£000	£0	£0
Reduction	£0	£0	£0
Net Impact	£000	£0	£0

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 From 2006 (under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC), it became a statutory duty to consider biodiversity across public bodies functions where applicable. It is anticipated that achieving biodiversity net gain in the Borough Local Plan will become law within months.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

Table 4: Impact of risk and mitigation

Risks	Uncontrolled risk	Controls	Controlled risk
Some residents may find 'wild' verges or 'wild' areas within parks less visually attractive	HIGH	Appropriate on-site signage coupled with on-line information to advise reasons for the changed management approach.	LOW

7. POTENTIAL IMPACTS

- 7.1 Equalities: There are no equality impacts associated with the recommendations of this report. The Royal Borough's parks and open spaces are all open access to all residents and visitors to the borough.
- 7.2 Climate change/sustainability. The recommendations set out in this report will have a positive impact on climate change/sustainability. An increase of biodiversity on the verges and in open spaces will enhance air quality and reduce pollution.
- 7.3 Data Protection/GDPR: There are no data protection impacts associated with the recommendations of this report. No personal data will be involved.

8. CONSULTATION

A number of workshops on this topic were held for ward members and Parish Councils in September 2019.

9. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 9.1 Implementation date if not called in: The full implementation stages are set out in table 5.

Table 5: Implementation timetable

Date	Details
November 2019	Approval of capital budget at Council
December 2019 onwards	Implementation of pilot projects
March 2020	Review of mowing and maintenance requirements for highway verges and parks and open spaces with Tivoli.
July 2020	Development of a wider Biodiversity Action Plan

10. APPENDICES

None

11. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 11.1 There are no background documents:

12. CONSULTATION (MANDATORY)

Name of consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
Cllr Stimson	Lead Member for Biodiversity, Green and Blue Infrastructure	19.09.19	01.10.19
Duncan Sharkey	Managing Director	03.10.19	10.10.19
Russell O'Keefe	Executive Director	03.10.19	10.10.19
Andy Jeffs	Executive Director	03.10.19	10.10.19
Ruth Watkins	Chief Accountant	03.10.19	22.10.19
Elaine Browne	Interim Head of Law and Governance	03.10.19	10.10.19
Nikki Craig	Head of HR and Corporate Projects	03.10.19	10.10.19
Louisa Dean	Communications	03.10.19	
Kevin McDaniel	Director of Children's Services	03.10.19	10.10.19
Hilary Hall	Interim Director of Adult Services and Deputy Director of Commissioning and Strategy	19.09.19	22.09.19

REPORT HISTORY

Decision type:	Urgency Item	To Follow item?
Key decision: 1 August 2019	No	No
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