

Southend-on-Sea City Council

Report of Executive Director for Neighbourhoods and Environment

To Cabinet

On
12 January 2023

Report prepared by: Paul Rabbitts, Head of Parks & Open Spaces

Agenda
Item No.

Bee Happy – A Grassland Management Strategy for Southend-on-Sea 2023-2027

Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s): Place
Cabinet Member: Councillor Carole Mulroney
Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present Cabinet with the Grassland Management Strategy which provides a framework for Southend-on-Sea City Council to improve the overall status and reduce losses in the diversity of pollinator species within the City and is recommended for adoption by the Council to allow delivery of the actions within.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- 2.1 That Cabinet adopt the Grassland Management Strategy as attached Appendix A.
- 2.2 Areas to be identified in advance and greater engagement with Ward Councillors, and residents' associations, with wider publicity.
- 2.3 Greater City-wide publicity to change 'minds and hearts' and encourage a culture change. This is not about saving money, but about our changing environment;
- 2.4 Greater onsite notices advising of why there have been changes; and
- 2.5 That Officers continue to engage with Members and communities in areas proposed for grassland management regime changes.

3. Background

- 3.1 In 2020 the Parks and Open Spaces Service commenced a piece of work as a response to the Global Climate Crisis we are all facing. As early as 2010, the Council carried out a Local Climate Impacts Profile ('LCLIP') to find out the effects that climate change could have on Southend.

3.2 The LCLIP found that the City is likely to feel the effect of:

- warmer and wetter winters
- hotter and drier summers
- an increased risk of coastal erosion
- more severe weather, such as coastal flooding and flash floods.

3.3 This helped us to identify 5 priority actions to reduce the most serious threats to the City. One of these priorities was to:-

- Manage natural resources sustainably:
 1. by using water more efficiently;
 2. by helping other species adapt and move as the climate changes;
 3. by making space for water along rivers and the coast.

3.4 As the evidence nationally and internationally has now indicated, the climate is changing considerably at an unprecedented rate. Local authorities are tackling this in many ways, including here in Southend-on-Sea. We have been investigating ways in which the Parks and Open Spaces Service can deliver this, through Grassland Management and increasing the number of pollinators in the City.

3.5 The parks, fields, gardens, open spaces, allotments and farmland across our City rely on the service pollination provides. Pollinators including bees, butterflies, hoverflies, wasps, beetles and flies are vital contributors to our landscapes, our economy and our food industry.

3.6 Evidence has shown that one-third of pollinating insects have seen population declines in parts of the UK from 1980 to 2013, which is particularly the case among rarer species, such as solitary bees (Powney et al., 2019). Action must be taken to promote the conservation of all pollinators.

4. Grassland Management Strategy

4.1 We must act now to ensure that we leave our environment in a better state for future generations and therefore Southend-on-Sea City Council has chosen to adopt the Government vision on bees and pollinators.

“...to see pollinators thrive, so they can carry out their essential service to people of pollinating flowers and crops while providing other benefits for our native plants, the wider environment, food production and all of us.”

4.2 By adopting the Government vision, the Council aims to deliver across four key areas:

1. Supporting pollinators across the town and countryside;
2. Enhancing the response to pest and disease risks;
3. Raising awareness of what pollinators need to survive and thrive;
4. Improving evidence on the status of pollinators and the service they provide.

4.3 By delivering on these aims, the Council is committed to delivering on the following outcomes:

- More, bigger, better, joined-up, diverse and high-quality flower-rich habitats (including nesting places and shelter) supporting our pollinators across the City;
- Healthy bees and other pollinators which are more resilient to climate change and severe weather events;
- Enhanced awareness across the City including a greater public understanding of the essential needs of pollinators;
- Evidence of actions taken to support pollinators.

4.4 The Parks and Open Spaces Team are therefore proposing to expand on the changes to Grassland Management Maintenance regimes across the City. From 2022, the service has gradually been looking at areas where grasslands can be managed where pollinators can be encouraged. Several areas have changed over the last 2 years within parks, on verges and in open spaces. The full rationale for doing so is highlighted in the strategy (see Appendix A).

4.5 This has been met in many cases, favourably and positively and we have seen areas of grassland flourish, wildflowers begin to become more established and because of this, more pollinators. However, in some instances, there has been localised opposition, partly due to ineffective consultation and in some cases, a lack of it, with Members and residents.

4.6 Looking ahead, to mitigate this, we are recommending the following:-

- The adoption of the strategy by Cabinet so this becomes a Council approved policy;
- Areas to be identified in advance and greater engagement with Ward Councillors, and residents' associations, with wider publicity;
- Greater City-wide publicity to change 'minds and hearts' and encourage a culture change. This is not about saving money, but about our changing environment; and
- Greater onsite notices advising of why there have been changes.

4. Other Options

4.1 Do nothing and retain the current management and maintenance standards – the impact would be that mowing regimes would not be conducive to enhancing local biodiversity.

5. Reasons for Recommendations

5.1 To allow the delivery of the Strategy and its wider action plans, with the outcome that we have a more sustainable environment in Southend-on-Sea and: -

“To see pollinators thrive, so they can carry out their essential service to people of pollinating flowers and crops while providing other benefits for our native plants, the wider environment, food production and all of us.”

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map

6.1.1 The delivery of the Grassland Management Strategy contributes to the Southend 2050 Road Map through 'Pride and Joy' and specifically: -

- *"We act as a sustainable and green City, embracing the challenges of the Climate Emergency Declaration made in 2019".*
- It also contributes to the Council's Corporate Plan as 'A city rising to the climate change challenge' where we will tackle climate change. We will become a greener city. We will make Southend-on-Sea a national example of good flood and coastal erosion risk management.

6.2 Financial Implications

6.2.1 There are limited financial implications for adopting new management regimes, but will result in some savings through lesser mowing regimes. These will depend on the size of the areas changed and the scale of the area adopted. A number of financial savings have been proposed as part of the councils intention to reduce the current deficit. This includes a significant proposal to reduce mowing regimes on grass verges on highways, central reservations and boulevards.

6.3 Legal Implications

6.3.1 There are no Legal implications associated with this report.

6.4 People Implications

6.4.1 The strategy highlights the misconception that re-wilding does not affect health in relation to those with breathing difficulties or suffering from hay fever.

6.5 Property Implications

6.5.1 There are no Property implications associated with this report.

6.6 Consultation

6.6.1 The initiative was widely consulted upon as part of the development of the strategy. Early issues have indicated support, as well as those that do not agree and tend to favour 'neat and tidy'. The Strategy highlights how we need to engage better as well as promote and encourage a 'change in culture'.

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

6.7.1 There are no Equality and Diversity implications associated with this report.

6.8 Risk Assessment

6.8.1 There are no Risk Assessment implications associated with this report.

6.9 Value for Money

6.9.1 There are no Value for Money implications associated with this report.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

6.10.1 There are no Community Safety implications associated with this report. There have been some comments from residents with regards to dogs and impact on their health, with ticks and seeds in ears. This has been noted.

6.11 Environmental Impact

6.11.1 These are highlighted in the strategy with many positive environmental benefits for the wider city.

7. Background Papers

7.1 These are highlighted in the Strategy

8. Appendices

8.1 **Appendix A:** Bee Happy – A Grassland Management Strategy for Southend-on-Sea 2022-2027