

Board/Committee:	Community Board
Date of meeting:	Wednesday 8 th September 2021
Title:	The Establishment of naturalised Flower Zones
Author:	Stevyn Ricketts
Status:	FOR DECISION

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the board for a change in the mowing regime across approximately 70,000 m² (5%) of amenity grass within the borough. To establish naturalised flower zones that will create a more attractive and diverse environment, increase biodiversity, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve the health and wellbeing of the community.

Recommendation

The Board approves the proposed maintenance changes from managed amenity grass to naturalised flower zones at the locations in Appendix A attached.

1.0

Background

- 1.1** Gosport has traditionally required its green spaces to be maintained in a resource intensive manner with tight specifications for grass cutting that generate multiple complaints when the grass is perceived to be too long or full of weeds. To maintain areas in this way demands a great deal of investment in resources that may on occasion appear to be ineffective due to dependence on many other factors that influence a high quality end product.
- 1.2** To create a more diverse landscape and to mitigate against climate change it is important that the Council look for opportunities to change areas of greenspace to increase natural and biodiverse promoting species, failure to do so will impact globally upon climate change seeing a rise in extreme weather events and continue to soak up resources that could be best used elsewhere.
- 1.3** Urban areas represent an estimated 8% of the total UK land area. Urban green spaces provide;
- Products such as food, water, fibre and fuel.
 - Services such as water purification, climate regulation, noise and air pollution reduction and flood hazard.
 - Non-material services, for example recreational enjoyment and aesthetic experience.
- 1.4** Recreation spent on nature in the UK urban environment was valued at £2.5 billion in 2017.

1.5

Land covered by maintained grassland is in general a carbon sink however this is not the case under drought conditions where the loss of vegetative cover converts the land to a source of carbon emission (Myrriotis *et al* 2021).

1.6

According to the Office of National Statistics, Natural capital accounts containing information about green space in urban areas, urban bird species have declined by 15% overall between 2005 and 2017 while mammal species in Great Britain's urban areas increased by 17% in 2015 compared with 2004, however some species such as the hedgehog declined.

1.7

Possible strategies for grass cutting and rewilding were discussed at the Climate Change Board on 21st January 2021. This strategy is developed in response to this discussion.

1.8

The technical solution for the establishment of a DSO (Community Board 22.01.2020) to deliver grounds maintenance included a move to the establishment of naturalised flower zones replacing approximately 70,000 m² (5%) of amenity grass.

2.0 Report

2.1

The way that we manage green spaces has the potential to contribute to a reduction in carbon emissions, increase carbon capture, increase biodiversity, improve soil and contribute to the health and wellbeing of the community.

2.2

The current maintenance of amenity grass areas within Gosport requires the grass to be maintained at a height that leaves it prone to loss of vegetative cover under drought conditions, reduces habitat and food sources for invertebrate species and requires considerable labour and machinery resources to maintain.

2.3

It is therefore proposed to apply a range of design and management solutions including the establishment of naturalised flower zones. This will involve removal of the grasses already growing in a location prior to establishment of flower species or rewilding.

2.4

The flower species selected for the zones will be composed of cultivated species, wild species or a mixture of wild and cultivated species according to the best solution for each location.

2.5

The removal of the grasses will be achieved by use of a glyphosate based herbicide and removal of the subsequent dead plant material to avoid cultivation of the soil, this will ensure we retain the structure and microbiome properties of the soil that promote future good plant and soil health.

- 2.6** Where rewilding is selected as the mode of creating naturalised flower zones the grass cover will be retained allowing for natural flower species to gradually establish.
- 2.7** When included with a wider range of climate change mitigations the establishment of naturalised flower zones will:
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the need for grass cutting.
 - Reduce use of non-renewable resources and waste products by decreasing use and maintenance of grass cutting machinery.
 - Improve maintenance in areas that require greater resource commitment by reducing some of the resources required for grass cutting at the most resource demanding times of the year.
 - Mitigate the effects of drought conditions that are predicted to occur more frequently in southeast England along with other climate extremes by increasing the drought tolerance of surface vegetation.
 - Increase biodiversity by creating habitat for invertebrate at the base of the food chain/web.
 - Provide a greater range of nectar producing plants and habitat for pollenating insects that are linked directly to the ability of humans to produce food.
 - Create a more attractive and diverse landscape.
- 2.8** There is a financial implication associated with this proposal, associated with the procurement of seed, compost and signage and the cut and collection of the zone areas in subsequent years.
- 2.9** The cost of seed and peat free compost for the locations and seed mixes in Appendix A has an estimated cost £0.80 per square metre, areas of rewilding do not have this cost implication and it is proposed that at least 20,000 m² of the naturalised flower zones should be created through rewilding. The total estimated cost of creating approximately 50,000 m² of naturalised flower zones is £40,000.
- 2.10** We propose to create the naturalised zones identified in Appendix A in late Summer 2021, with rewilding areas introduced in spring 2022. The establishment of the remaining 40,000 m² of naturalised flower zones to follow in 2022 and 2023.
- 2.11** To cut and collect the zones at the end of the flowering season is estimated to match the current financial cost of maintenance of the amenity grass and so has no impact on the maintenance budget.

3.0 Risk Assessment

3.1 The risks attached to this change are:

- A small number of complaints based on areas appearing to be 'a mess' or that an insufficient amount of naturalised flower zones have been created.
- A minor increase in littering, dog fouling and fly tipping may occur.
- Failure of seed to germinate.
- Extreme rainfall events washing out seed or newly established plants.
- Gradual loss of floral species due to vigorous grass growth.

3.2 Risk mitigations

3.2.1 *Education*

It is intended to counter negative comments by providing details of the changes and why they are taking place via a web page on the Gosport Borough Council website and on site signage that includes a link to the web page.

3.2.2 *Littering*

Continued enforcement of the areas selected for naturalised flower zones.

3.2.3 *Seed germination*

The seed will be procured from sources that guarantee high seed viability and germination percentage and will be sown onto moist undisturbed soil at the optimum time of year for sowing. Dry conditions occurring soon after germination will require the areas to be watered to ensure establishment.

3.2.4 *Extreme Weather*

Extreme weather in the form of intense rainfall will only be an issue during the first two months following germination, should this occur more seed would need to be purchased and sown to fill any resulting gaps in vegetation cover.

3.2.5 *Loss of floral species*

Over time grasses will encroach into the naturalised flower zones, this will create a meadow and the grasses are unlikely to be excessively vigorous due to reduced nutrient levels. Where it is desirable to maintain a more cultivated floral landscape there will be a requirement to remove weed species and sow additional seed to ensure soil coverage is maintained as and when required.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 Rewilding grass areas and sowing naturalised flower zones will increase

biodiversity and provide greater amenity value, boost the health & well-being of the residents and provide the community with a landscape that actively offsets the causes and effects of climate change.

Financial Services comments:	Contained within the report
Legal Services comments:	Contained within the report
Equality and Diversity:	Refer to the Integrated Impact Assessment
Climate Change implications:	Refer to the Integrated Impact Assessment
Crime and Disorder:	Refer to Risk Assessment Section 3
Service Improvement Plan implications:	Positive impact on the service improvement plan outlined in Section 2
Corporate Plan:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising Aspirations – by improving the environment in which people live, socialise and relax they will subsequently feel more positive about their surroundings. • Enhancement of the Environment – by making positive improvements to the aesthetics of the environment and tackling climate change. • Empowering Residents – with the understanding that their council is taking positive action to militate against climate change and promote access to nature, it is hoped that residents will feel empowered to do similar within their own gardens or take a more informed interest in tackling climate change. • Developing the Economy – by improving the green spaces within the borough making it an attractive environment for business. <p>Delivering Effective Services – by utilising budgets and resources to have a positive impact on addressing climate change.</p>
Risk Assessment:	Shown in section 3
Background Papers:	<p>Myrgiotis, V., Smallman, T.L. and Williams, M., 2021. The carbon budget of the managed grasslands of Great Britain constrained by earth observations. <i>Biogeosciences Discussions</i>, pp.1-35. Accessed online 25.06.2021.</p> <p>ONS 2019. UK Natural Capital: Urban Accounts.</p> <p>Gosport Borough Council Climate Change Strategy.</p> <p>Possible strategies for grass cutting and rewilding - Climate Change Board 21.01.2021.</p>
Appendices:	<i>Appendix A – Location Maps</i>
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