

HIGH PEAK BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

14 JUNE 2023

QUESTIONS REFERRED TO THE EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR

Question from Councillor Collins:

High Peak Borough Council has committed to improving the biodiversity of the High Peak, including on its own land, as in the Parks Strategy¹. It set up a Biodiversity Working Group, now incorporated into the climate change group, reflecting the fact that these environmental concerns are interrelated.

In the Council invited Plantlife², a national charity, to speak about encouraging biodiversity on road verges. Recommendations from Plantlife included changing mowing regimes along verges. This can be extended to Council-owned land. The Council held a pilot during which it reduced mowing on a patch of its own land, to see whether there were complaints. It was reported to the Biodiversity Working Group that there were no complaints. In some places, in contrast, mowing is too infrequent, allowing footpaths to become nearly impassable. Changing mowing regimes could potentially save money and reduce emissions through less use of machinery. On Council land, it would allow common, attractive wildflowers such as cuckoo flower to flourish and brighten up the amenity value of the land.

However, the Council has consistently argued against changing mowing regimes. With regard to verges, it states that verges are managed under contract to Derbyshire CC. This need not be a barrier to change. In Derbyshire Dales, verges are also maintained under contract to Derbyshire, yet the mowing regime has changed there to allow wildflowers to flourish.

In order to protect biodiversity, in line with Council strategy, what changes to mowing regimes will the Council put in place for next year?

Response:

We note the comments made which references the need to change mowing regimes on Council land in order to encourage biodiversity and help contribute to wider climate change aspirations.

Since the launch of the High Peak Parks Strategy, changes have been made to the way a number of sites which the Council own are maintained, such as in Serpentine Walks in Buxton where a new biodiversity plan has been agreed between the Council, local interest groups and Alliance Environmental Services (AES). The plan includes amended mowing schedules and the establishment of wildflower areas thus providing an extremely positive case study of our approach to the involvement of working with local community groups.

There are also projects complete or progressing at Temple Fields and Ashwood Park in Buxton, Whaley Bridge Memorial Park, Hare Hills Park, Glossop along with the Council supporting the No

¹ https://www.highpeak.gov.uk/media/6280/HPBC-Parks-Strategy-2021---2031/pdf/Parks_Strategy_v_2.pdf?m=1647415674867

² <https://roadverges.plantlife.org.uk/>

Mow May initiative at 3 sites in High Peak with a view to exploring more permanent changes to mowing regimes in these areas too.

It is an aspiration to continue to expand this approach and use the principles within the Parks Strategy together with the experience of delivering the above projects to guide other areas. Whilst we are keen to progress more projects it is important that the selection and delivery of such projects are managed carefully and are considerate to the resources available, existing/future work priorities and the involvement of other parties, such as internal colleagues, service providers and for example DCC where verge mowing contracts are already in place.

These contractual arrangements are a material consideration and need to be factored in when approaching any projects that are agreed corporately to progress.

This year we have plans to continue to work with internal colleagues (such as Communities and Climate Change) to make further progress with some of the projects listed above and also with supporting other projects which have not been included in this response.

Our team would be happy to discuss these projects/plans in further detail and also consider suggestions for similar projects elsewhere in the Borough.