

## REPORT

**SUBJECT: Proposed Pollinator Policy**

**MEETING: Cabinet**

**DATE: 19<sup>th</sup> March 2014**

**DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All**

### 1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To consider the proposed Pollinator Policy that promotes the creation of pollinator friendly habitats on land owned by Monmouthshire County Council.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Cabinet agrees the proposed policy.

### 3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 There is a growing recognition that action needs to be undertaken to halt the decline of pollinators, due to the need to safeguard the food chain and local habitats.
- 3.2 In July 2013, Welsh Government launched their Action Plan for Pollinators and Monmouthshire needs to respond positively to this Plan.
- 3.3 Monmouthshire has the ability to make significant changes by altering its planting and grass cutting regimes around roadside verges, amenity space, cemeteries and flower beds.
- 3.4 The proposed policy will result in positive benefits to the local environment and revenue savings.
- 3.5 No changes will be undertaken to grass cutting alongside C & R class highways networks.
- 3.6 Proposed changes to grass cutting alongside A & B class highways routes will be subject to a health and safety assessment to ensure that the proposed changes do not impact negatively on visibility or the safety of users.

- 3.7. All Town and Community Councils will be contacted and advised of the proposed policy. If they consider that this would present a local issue they will be encouraged to contact us so that we can investigate their concerns after the first tailored cut and if appropriate a further cut would be made.

#### **4. REASONS**

- 4.1 The National Ecosystem Assessment Survey of 2011 evidenced that pollinators have been declining for 30 years and without changes to our cultivation and planting practices this situation will not improve.
- 4.2 Pollinators are essential to UK agriculture. It is estimated that their value to the agricultural industry is £430 million a year and that twenty percent of the cropped areas are dependent on pollinators.
- 4.3 Councils are under a legal duty via the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising its functions. The proposed changes are fully in accord with this.
- 4.4 A positive consequence of the changes to the management practices will be a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> estimated at 60,000kg and a reduction in methane estimated at 4,200kg.

#### **5. Resource Implications**

The savings relating to the implementation of this policy amount to £34,000 and these formed part of the budget mandate relating to Highways operations and Traffic Management which was discussed with the committee at its budget meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2013. Members broadly supported the mandate and agreed to discuss the policy in greater depth at its meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2014 (Extract of the minutes of 8<sup>th</sup> November 2013 attached as appendix 1)

#### **6. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

The strategy will not have a negative impact on any of the protected groups and should result in a positive impact on the sustainability agenda.

#### **7. CONSULTEES:**

The proposed policy has been widely consulted amongst community and stakeholders as follows:

Gwent Wildlife Trust

Bee Friendly Monmouthshire Group

Crick Wildlife & Environment Project

Adventa

Rogiet Allotments and Leisure Garden Society

Keep Wales Tidy  
Monmouthshire Meadows Group  
Friends of Castle Meadows  
Town and Community Councils  
Gwent Police  
Chepstow Transition  
Monmouthshire Housing Association  
Aneurin Bevan Health Board  
Bristol City Council  
South Lanarkshire Council

### **Results of Consultation**

Have been incorporated within the Policy.  
Petitions both for (Appendix 4- Results of on-line petition supporting policy)  
and against (Appendix 5 for ease attached separate to the policy) the  
policy have been received and were presented to Full Council by Members.

#### **8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

None

#### **9. AUTHOR:**

Alison Howard Sustainability Community Officer

#### **10. CONTACT DETAILS:**

Tel: 01633 644844

Email: [alisonhoward@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:alisonhoward@monmouthshire.gov.uk)

## Appendix 1 – Proposed Pollinator Policy

### Monmouthshire County Council Pollinator Policy

#### 1. Introduction

It is been widely recognised that pollinators play a vital role in the security of our food supply and the quality of our natural environment. There has been an ongoing decline in the numbers of pollinators and therefore action is being taken by both Welsh Government and Westminster to try and halt this decline.

Welsh Government published their [Action Plan for Pollinators](#) in July 2013, which sets out their strategic vision, outcomes and areas for action to improve conditions for pollinators and halt their decline.

#### 2. Pollinators and their habitats

Pollinators within the Action Plan are defined as:

“all bees, some wasps, butterflies, moths and hoverflies, some beetles and flies”.

Traditionally pollinators rely on habitats made up of meadows, hedgerows, woodland edges, unimproved grasslands, hay meadows, clover rich grasslands, orchards and arable crops. A change to agricultural practices, changing land use and intensification has resulted in a decline in these traditional habitats.

Alternative habitats can be provided in gardens, parks, open spaces and road verges.

#### 3. Monmouthshire County Council’s Legal Responsibilities.

##### 3.1 Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006

This Council has a legal duty under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006 to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising its functions.

Section 42 of the Act specifies a list of priority species that should be used to guide decision making in implementing their biodiversity duty. The list is produced by the National Assembly of Wales in conjunction with the Natural Resources Wales and [contains pollinators and their habitats](#)

##### 3.2 Monmouthshire’s Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP)

Monmouthshire has produced a [Local Biodiversity Action Plan](#) in partnership with Natural Resources Wales (formerly Countryside Council for Wales) and the Monmouthshire Biodiversity Partnership. This plan provides advice on priority habitats and species and guidance on such considerations within the planning process.

This Plan identifies species rich boundary and linear features within the County and the management of these.

#### 4. Monmouthshire's Approach

4.1 Recognizing the importance of pollinators to our agricultural industry, local biodiversity and food chain, Monmouthshire will where ever possible and reasonable to do so, actively promote the development of pollinator habitats by implement planting and maintenance regimes designed to support and enhance these habitats and encourage pollinators.

4.2 We will do this by:

- Reducing the number of cuts to grassed areas – This will allow a longer growing period, enabling plants to set seeds and encourage greater diversity of plant species.
- Introduce urban annual wildflowers to formal beds and perennial meadow mix (which will include garden species) to urban areas. Planting schemes in all other public areas will directly reflect the policy. \*
- On A & B highways routes, where safe to do so, change the time of verge cuts and reduce to 2 cuts per year.
- Identify opportunities for the development of meadow areas within amenity and open spaces.
- Continually review our grass cutting and planting practices ensuring compliance with emerging legislation and best practice.
- Utilise the Bee Friendly Monmouthshire logo to raise awareness of the changes in practice and the underlying reasons
- Monitor the effectiveness of the changing practices. We will visit sites that have been subject to the changes to see if pollinator supporting habitats have been created and sustained.

\*This mix will be subject to variation dependent on the success of the varieties, localised growing condition and any health and safety concerns.

## **Appendix 2: Extract of the minutes of the Special Strong Communities Select Committee held on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

### **2. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM**

Mr David Maddox of Devauden drew attention to a petition which had been submitted by local residents about safety concerns relating to the County Council's new biodiversity policy. In particular, local residents were unhappy that this policy embraced a reduction in verge maintenance and would compromise safety. Indeed, under current verge cutting procedures, there were already concerns about overhanging hedgerows reducing the width of narrow (R and C) country roads and the growth of flowers and vegetation on verges in general was giving rise to visibility issues during peak summer growing periods, particularly in terms of the B4293. In response, the Committee was informed that the County Council's Highways Operation Unit had met with local residents to discuss their concerns about maintaining verges and it was highlighted how current and proposed procedures were designed to optimise the effectiveness of the maintenance provided, addressing both safety and biodiversity needs. Whilst Mr Maddox acknowledged this liaison activity had been undertaken, he remained deeply concerned about the safety implications of overgrown verges and hedges, particularly in relation to fast growing nettles.

Arising from these references to green initiatives, it was highlighted that the Strong Communities Select Committee would be discussing Pollinators in January 2014.

### **4 (iii) HIGHWAYS OPERATIONS AND TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT**

The business case concerning Highways Operations and Traffic Management Operations set out a range of proposals which targeted savings collectively totaling £430k for 2014/15, which represented an 11% saving on the current year's budget. The breakdown of these savings was detailed as follows:

- A new Biodiversity Policy with reduced verge maintenance, upholding 2 cuts for R and C Routes, but reducing A and B routes to 2 safety cuts only (Visibility Splays). Areas outside these classifications would be left to grow during summer months and would be cut only once (during winter period). County Council staff would undertake cutting work instead of contractors. All Highway horticultural sites would be removed and MCC shrub beds would be replanted in a more sustainable manner – **targeted savings of £34k;**
- ❖ Concern was expressed about the need for provision to carry out extra verge cutting work when particular problems became evident, as highlighted earlier in the meeting by Mr Maddox. Accordingly, it was acknowledged that occasionally such problems did occur and there would continue to be scope for dealing with specific problems.
- ❖ With regard to Pollinators, it was acknowledged with concern that the bee population in the UK had decreased by 60% to 70% in recent years and it was noted that, in some parts of the UK it had been necessary to import bees from the Netherlands to attempt to halt the decline in British bees;

- ❖ Concern was expressed about the cost of implementing the Council's new Biodiversity Policy and it was noted that it was scheduled that a report on this matter would be presented to the January meeting of the committee;

### Appendix 3 – Location of yellow rattle planting.

The purpose of this planting strategy is to evaluate the success of this method of preparing the site for urban flowers.

<b>m2</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>
350	A40 L/H from Hardwick Roundabout to Gobannium Way
54	A40 Junction Gobannium Way left to Bus shelter
8300	Open Space at De Cantelupe Close
1300	Swan Meadows between footpath and River Gavenny
220	Junction Old Hereford Road and Llwynu Lane
72	Junction Hillside and Pen-y-pound
102	A40 Brecon Road between "Abergavenny" sign and "Tourist" sign
40	B4246 Llanfoist L/H verge adjacent to Dan-y-Bloreng
340	B4246 Govilon R/H verge at Junction for Lower Cadvor Farm
88	A4042 Llanellen L/H verge entering village over river bridge
102	Near Comeonin Garage verge at Junc. with A40 Dual Carriageway
55	B4293 adjacent to junction with Beech Road
540	Beech Road from footpath near A40 to substation
	Orchard area at St.Dials L/H side Portal Road
616	Portal Road L/H verge heading up from 30mph sign to tunnels
900	Floodbank alongside Sportsground from new bridge down river
374	A466 Hereford Road(Buckholt) R/H verge towards end of 30mph
1062	Castle Dell, Chepstow L/H side main open space
1700	A48 Dual L/H(Chepstow-Caerwent) from bridge to road narrows
1060	A48 Dual L/H(Caerwent-Chepstow) from layby to bridge
660	A48 Junction Merton Green to Junction Dinham Road
648	A48 Junction with Caerwent village L/H verge before junction
665	A48 Junction with Caerwent village L/H verge after junc.to shelter
301	Redwick Road, Magor from junc. with Withy Walk towards car park

## Appendix 4 – Results of on-line petition supporting the pollinator policy.

### **Bees for Development Trust** 1 Agincourt Street, Monmouth NP25

3DZ, UK Tel +44 (0)16007 14848 info@beesfordevelopment.org www.beesfordevelopment.org tw:  
@BeesForDev Bees for Development Trust UK Charity 1078803

Trust Patrons: Monty Don, Baroness Anita Gale, Martha Kearney, Prof. Thomas D Seeley, Sting (Gordon Sumner), Bill Turnbull. Registered Office: 1 Agincourt Street, Monmouth, NP25 3DZ, UK Bees for Development Trust is the working title of The Troy Trust, Registered Charity 1078803

06 March 2014

Dear Cllr Hobson,

#### **Petition: Please, Bee Friendly Monmouthshire**

Signatures: 771 signatures

Please find below *selected quotes from signatories of our petition in support of the changes proposed to road-side verge cutting on Monmouthshire:*

“Monmouthshire has the capacity to have the most wild life friendly verges possible. Less mowing and more careful timing around maintenance could make an enormous difference.”

“Verges represent potentially the largest nature reserve in the country - if they are managed sympathetically. They are also the largest remaining area of 'unimproved' land - where fertilizers haven't caused the loss of wild flowers and the creatures that depend on them and pollinate them. Cutting too much and too early prevents seed set and therefore causes the loss of wild flowers. The existing seed bank in the soil will only persist for a few years after which the plant species are lost for good. We have the opportunity to save these species and the pollinators that we depend on - but only if we act now and face up to our responsibilities. Don't let ignorance win out over sensible management.”

“Not only are wild flowers good for pollinating insects they are beautiful too! In a time when Local Authorities are needing to reduce costs it seems perverse to continue costly cutting in places where there is no safety issue.. Furthermore Monmouthshire has huge advantage over many urban Local Authorities where there are increasing initiatives to encourage wild flowers. Please capitalise on your rural good fortune and accept this intelligent policy.”

“Pollinating insects are essential to our survival. Roadside verges are fast becoming the largest and possibly only remaining sanctuary for the wildlife that supports them. delaying the first cut saves the wildlife and our future. The normal process should only occur at sites of road hazard eg junctions and blind bends. Further a motorist can see the faster they drive. So please care for both humans and wildlife and delay the first cut”



“Great policy...good on Monmouthshire”

“Plants which support pollinator species are an extremely important resource and this policy seems well structured to enhance their occurrence”

“The roadside verges are a vital link for pollinators and road safety can be taken into account. maybe after seeing the policy in action the dissenters will realise it benefits all.”

“Newport have created amazing wildflower verges, lets provide the same in Monmouthshire!”

“Go on Monmouth, lead the way and the others will follow”

“Must help all animals! We must be their voice!”

“I am both a car driver and a wildlife enthusiast. Where we live some of the road verges have not been cut, but I am still capable of driving safely on the roads. Country lanes should be driven with caution at all times anyway.”

“Flowers on verges = pollinator pathways and make journeys more pleasant for car passengers too!”

“I agree with roadside flowers to help our pollinators and make the country look less sterile of which it is quickly becoming”

**Bee Friendly Monmouthshire**

**<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/bee-friendly-monmouthshire>**

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