



**ST HELENS**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

## Cabinet

**10 November 2021**

<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>Cabinet Response to the Scrutiny Spotlight Review of Wildflower Sustainability and Grass Cutting</b>
<b>Cabinet Portfolio</b>	Environment & Transport
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Andy Bowden
<b>Exempt Report</b>	No
<b>Reason for Exemption</b>	N/A
<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Public Notice issued</b>	N/A
<b>Wards Affected</b>	All
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<b>Borough priorities</b>	Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life	
	Promote good health, independence, and care across our communities	
	Create safe and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all	
	Support a strong, thriving, inclusive and well-connected local economy	
	Create green and vibrant places that reflect our heritage and culture	X
	Be a responsible Council	

## 1. Summary

- 1.1 This report presents a proposed Action Plan in response to the recommendations made by the Wildflower Sustainability and Grass Cutting Spotlight Review report which was approved by the Place Services Scrutiny Committee meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

## 2. Recommendations for Decision

**Cabinet is recommended to:**

- i) Approve the Action Plan attached at Appendix 1 that sets out the response to the recommendations from the Place Services Scrutiny Committee's Wildflower Sustainability and Grass Cutting Spotlight Review report; and**
- ii) Provide the response to the recommendations at the meeting of the Place Services Scrutiny Committee to be held on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

## 3. Purpose of this Report

- 3.1 This report presents an Action Plan that sets out how the recommendations made during the recent task group review may be implemented and delivered over the coming months and years, specifically as part of the Council's response to the climate emergency declared in 2019.

## 4. Background /Reasons for the recommendations

- 4.1 In August 2021 the Place Services Scrutiny Committee established a spotlight review group to review the Council's approach to Wild flowering sustainability and grass cutting. This was a short and focused review that included a workshop with a number of the Council's technical grounds maintenance officers to understand current practices. The workshop highlighted a range of opportunities and risks associated with introducing a new and different approach to grass cutting and wild flowering.
- 4.2 Following the workshop with officers and a comprehensive assessment of best practice across the UK, the task group developed a series of recommendations that are being presented to cabinet alongside this report November 2021. This report and associated appendices provide a practical assessment of the most appropriate and effective way of delivering on the recommendations put forward during the spotlight review.

- 4.3 The Council's Constitution provides rules regarding the submission of reports by Overview and Scrutiny to Cabinet and the provision of a response to reports by Cabinet; as set out in Sections 8 and 9 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules contained in Part 4 of the Constitution.

## **5 Community Impact Assessment**

- 5.1 A Community Impact Assessment has been undertaken which highlights the volunteering opportunities of these proposals and the positive impact on the environment and biodiversity.

## **6 Consideration of Alternatives**

- 6.1 There are no alternative options related to this report. As the recommendations made by the task group are taken forward there will be a series of options to deliver on the outcomes of realising the benefits of extending wild flowering.

## **7 Conclusions**

- 7.1 The review undertaken by the task group highlights the potential benefits of further promoting wild flowering across the borough and how this may improve biodiversity and the recovery of local nature. The review demonstrates the good work already being done in the borough and the success of the existing wild flowering pilots. However, it does also raise some of the practical, reputational, safety and financial considerations that must be considered prior to rolling out a new and different approach to wild flowering and grass cutting across the borough.
- 7.2 The task group review also aligns well with many of the current and emerging activities covering the breadth of environmental services delivered by the Council. These include responding to the climate emergency, the imminent publication of a new Environment Bill, a local parks and open spaces review, and the adoption of a new Local Plan.
- 7.3 It is proposed that the delivery of the recommendations is primarily incorporated into the Council's climate change strategy and supporting action plan that will be developed over the next 6-12 months.

## **8 Implications**

### 8.1 Legal Implications

- 8.1.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

### 8.2 Community Impact Assessment (CIA) Implications

#### 8.2.1 Social Value

- 8.2.1.1 There will be opportunities for local volunteers, community groups and businesses to support the local authority in promoting wild flowering across the borough the service will utilise the volunteering portal to coordinate this activity.

#### 8.2.2 Sustainability and Environment

- 8.2.2.1 Wild flowering increases biodiversity and will play a key part in our response to the climate emergency. The specific details will be contained in the Council's climate change strategy and supporting action plan.

### 8.2.3 Health and Wellbeing

8.2.3.1 Improving access to and having vibrant and diverse parks and open spaces play a key part in the health and wellbeing of residents across the Borough. This has been evidenced across the UK during the recent pandemic.

### 8.2.4 Equality and Human Rights

8.2.4.1 There are no direct impacts to Equality or Human Rights emerging from the recommendations within the Task Group report and the Action Plan.

### 8.3 Customers and Resident

8.3.1 Residents and visitors to the borough will all need to be consulted with as part of any plans to make significant changes to the management of our parks, open spaces or highway. The task group identified that some members of the community may oppose changes that would see a reduced cutting frequency of grass. There will need to be extensive communications and engagement in order to secure buy in from the community

### 8.4 Asset and Property

8.4.1 There are no asset or property issues arising from this report.

### 8.5 Staffing and Human Resource

8.5.1 There are no staffing implications at this stage.

### 8.6 Risks

8.6.1 Road safety is the primary risk associated with the recommendations made by the task group. Whilst there is confidence that these risks can be managed, we must ensure that our highway network is well maintained and free from obstruction that may compromise safety.

### 8.7 Finance

8.7.1 Costs associated with implementing the recommendations set out in this report will be minimal unless a very different approach to the maintenance of grassed areas is introduced, therefore they can be contained within existing budgets.

### 8.8 Policy Framework Implications

8.8.1 The recommendations outlined in this report help to deliver the “Create green and vibrant Places that reflect our heritage and culture” priority within the #StHelensTogether Borough Strategy. They also support the Council’s climate change strategy and supporting action plan.

## **9 Background papers**

9.1 N/A

## **10 Appendices**

10.1 Appendix 1 – Wildflower Sustainability and Grass Cutting action plan response

## 10.2 Appendix 2 – Wildflower Sustainability and Grass Cutting Spotlight Review Report