

North Somerset Council

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE ORGANISATION POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE OF MEETING: 3 MARCH 2020

SUBJECT OF REPORT: RE-WILDING - PROGRESS UPDATE

TOWN OR PARISH: ALL

OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: JOHN FLANNIGAN, COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT SERVICE MANAGER

KEY DECISION: N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to consider the consultation responses to the re-wilding proposals and its future implementation; and to consider how to improve future consultations and to weigh wider community benefits of re-wilding against local concerns.

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report outlines the responses to the re-wilding consultation described in the report to Community and Corporate Organisation Policy and Scrutiny Panel (CCO) on 5 November 2019. The consultation ran from 11 November 2019 to 24 January 2020 and we received 494 responses with 78% supporting re-wilding across North Somerset.

The consultation was publicised using a range of approaches:

- Meetings were also held with each of the Town Councils to explain about the purpose of rewilding and to show where it was being proposed to be implemented.
- We also held two meetings with Parish Councils for the same purpose. Feedback from these meetings, both during the meeting, and in subsequent correspondence was largely positive.
- We also informed 18 individuals and groups with an interest in nature conservation of the consultation, seeking to inform as many people as possible
- We posted notices of the consultation in all libraries.
- We ran a wide-ranging media campaign in the printed press and on social media pointing people to the consultation pages.

The consultation also sought volunteers with 230 people offering their time to help with re-wilding.

At the time of writing of this report (18/2/20) we have completed 8 of our 25 tree planting sites for this year, with approximately 1600 trees planted and 140 volunteers engaged.

2. POLICY

Climate change emergency
Council re-wilding motion

3. DETAILS

Following Council motion COU50 (23 July 2019 Full Council), the CCO Panel report dated 5 November 2019 and discussion with Executive Members, a consultation exercise was carried out seeking residents' views on proposed re-wilding across our amenity grass sites and seeking volunteers to support its implementation and ongoing maintenance.

The consultation ran from 11 November 2019 to 24 January 2020 and was widely publicised. Appendix A shows the extents of the consultation's publicity.

There was a high number of responses to the consultation (494 people). For example, 78% of respondents supported rewilding in North Somerset; and 71% supported rewilding in their neighbourhood.

Results from the consultation have been published online on the Council's econsult pages (https://n-somerset.inconsult.uk/gf2.ti/-/1084290/63998277.1/PDF/-/Rewilding_consultation_summary_of_results.pdf)

The focus for re-wilding has been at sites where we carry out 'amenity grass cutting' and an ambitious target of 25% reduction in amenity grass areas has been identified. All the proposed areas were clearly shown in the consultation documentation and are still visible on line (<http://map.n-somerset.gov.uk/Rewilding.html>).

Re-wilding will be delivered in stages acknowledging the logistical issues of introducing such significant changes to our management of amenity grass areas. The current proposal for the ongoing implementation of re-wilding is described below.

Phase 1 operated to a very tight timetable which gave little time between the announcement of the tree planting locations and the actual activity taking place. The following describes the process of delivering Phase 1:

1. Phase 1 sites could not be finalised until the 494 consultation responses had been fully reviewed after the consultation ended on 24 January 2020. As described earlier, we modified our proposals after reviewing responses;
2. Tree planting needed to be completed by end of February 2020 because the supplied trees are bare root and must be planted when dormant;
3. The list of sites needed to be shared as quickly as possible to give volunteers and local communities as much time as possible to prepare themselves.

This meant that we were able to publicise the tree planting locations for the first phase (selected from the rewilding map shared during the consultation) on 4 February 2020, ten days after the closing date of the rewilding consultation.

Phase	Activity	Notes	Time period
1	5000 trees to be planted	This will be completed by 1 March 2020	February 2020
2	Tall grass management	Some carefully evaluated areas will be selected for tall grass management in April 2020	Summer 2020
3	20,000 trees to be planted	Sites will be evaluated during the summer 2020 for this phase	Winter 2020/21
4	Tall grass management areas created	The new grounds and trees maintenance contract will be in place and tall grass areas will be selected prior to the growing season	Summer 2021
5	25,000 trees to be planted	Sites will be evaluated during the summer 2021 for this phase	Winter 2021/22
6	Tall grass management areas created	The new grounds and trees maintenance contract will be established, and tall grass areas will be selected prior to the growing season	Summer 2022
7	Expand re-wilding beyond amenity grass	New sites will need to be identified that are suitable for re-wilding	Ongoing

These next phases of rewilding will be delivered in a number of ways.

Tree planting and maintenance:

Phase one has demonstrated that there is a keen body of volunteers willing to support the delivery of re-wilding. Once Phase One has been completed we will be working to retain these volunteers and to create activities to keep their interest in the project. This will involve future tree planting and maintenance.

We will be able to carry out more engagement activities with local communities later this year to discuss tree planting locations when Officers have more time to do so.

Tall grass management

The current Parks and Street scene contract has been extended by one year to allow the new contract to be specified to be able to deliver re-wilding in our parks, verges and open spaces. In particular, the contract will be prepared to be able to deliver the tall grass objectives. The re-wilding consultation has enabled us to be able to start to quantify this new specification and this will be further refined following feedback from the Your Neighbourhood consultation.

Nature emergency

One issue that has arisen during the consultation is the impact that re-wilding would have on addressing the climate emergency.

Authorities have been describing a nature/ecology emergency in parallel to the climate emergency. This nature emergency is evidenced by the decline of many birds, insects and some mammals; and this can be observed in our area where we now see fewer birds such as starlings and swifts. Losses in bee numbers, and other insects have also been widely reported and numbers of hedgehogs are declining.

Declining nature has its roots in the same processes that have contributed to the climate emergency (e.g. industrialisation, development, pollution).

Members are therefore asked to consider supporting the adoption of a nature emergency alongside the existing climate emergency.

Such a nature emergency would require a plan to address the issues. The new Corporate Plan contains a commitment to prepare a green infrastructure strategy and addressing the nature emergency could be a key element of this strategy.

4. CONSULTATION

Information relating to the consultation can be found here (<https://n-somerset.inconsult.uk/consult.ti/rewilding/consultationHome>)

Appendix A identifies all the channels used to share the consultation.

In addition to the consultation responses described on econsult, five Towns and Parishes contributed, and these are outlined below.

Town or Parish Council	Comments
Winscombe and Sandford	Supporting re-wilding and looking forward to carrying out activities on their land
Nailsea Town Council	A detailed response was provided amending our proposals. This will be looked at in more detail once Phase 1 is completed.
Wick St Lawrence	Supporting re-wilding but concerns about potential impacts on path users and potential increases in ragwort and ticks.
Cleeve	Supporting re-wilding but advised us to change locations for tree planting which we accepted
Yatton	A detailed response was provided amending our proposals. This will be looked at in more detail once Phase 1 is completed.

The consultation was effective in that it enabled residents to seek changes to our plans which was a key objective of the consultation. We therefore responded to several different communities to either cease our re-wilding plans at specific locations or to review them with members and residents during this forthcoming summer.

Notwithstanding, support for re-wilding has been very encouraging including many positive examples from the consultation exercise and the numbers of volunteers who have turned up to plant trees during a particularly wet February.

However, there has been some criticism from residents who were unaware of the re-wilding proposals to plant trees near their homes. This raises some important issues about how we

share the information with residents especially as re-wilding will expand considerably over the next two years.

In terms of our publicity for the consultation, Appendix A demonstrates a wide array of methods to engage with our community and the relatively high number of responses indicates that this was successful.

It is therefore proposed that future re-wilding publicity will follow the current model but will also include a notice erected at each site. This will outline the rewilding proposals for the specific location giving communities opportunity to comment further.

Letters to residents surrounding the site has been proposed but this has two disadvantages. It would be very costly to do this in terms of administering the letters and the postal costs. Secondly, open space is used and enjoyed by residents who do not live near the space and who would therefore be excluded.

Members will need to consider how to weigh the wider community benefits of the re-wilding policy against potentially narrow objections of local residents.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Costs

The Woodland Trust provided all the trees and sundries for the planting of Phase 1.

Costs for future tree planting will be calculated once Phase One has been completed because this will provide a very useful benchmark.

Costs for tall grass management for Phase Two are incorporated within the current Parks and Street Scene contract.

Funding

Future funding for tree planting will be sought from a variety of sources including government grants, mitigation/offsetting from development, commercial opportunities and revenue funding.

Community volunteers are a key part of the future management and maintenance of re-wilding and we have successfully recruited many people through the consultation exercise. This will help keep costs down at the same time as providing a meaningful activity for people to enjoy.

6. LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

These activities are part of the Council's responsibilities for maintaining its land.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Re-wilding will increase biodiversity and the additional tree planting will also increase our capture of carbon.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

Delivering re-wilding on our land is not considered to present any significant risk.

More detailed explanation, in the form of FAQs, will be prepared this year to address people's concerns about re-wilding ensuring that the purpose of re-wilding is fully messaged.

9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Have you undertaken an Equalities Impact Assessment? YES

The consultation did not identify any site specific issues with our re-wilding proposals. Our tree planting was carried out ensuring existing paths were retained guaranteeing that access opportunities have not changed.

10. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Re-wilding addresses Corporate objectives of a greener North Somerset.

11. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

None

AUTHOR

John Flannigan, Community and Environment Service Manager

APPENDICES

Appendix A - publicity for consultation exercise

Appendix B – tree planting schedule February 2020

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Full Council meeting 23 July 2019 - <http://apps.n-somerset.gov.uk/cairo/docs/doc29744.htm>

CCO Panel report 5 November 2019 - <https://apps.n-somerset.gov.uk/Meetings/ByCommittee/10/2019/16>

Appendix A – publicity for consultation exercise

The following environmental organisations were contacted directly:

Transition Nailsea
 Weston and Hutton in Bloom
 Dial Hill and wood cutters
 Weston Civic Society
 Clevedon Civic Society
 Chris Sperring
 Uphill Village Society
 YACWAG
 Big Worle
 Transition Clevedon
 Pill flower bank
 Portishead in Bloom
 Friends of Maltlands Park
 Friends of Watchhouse Hill
 Friends of Trendlewood
 Friends of Prince Consort Gardens
 Shrubbery group
 Friends of Grove Park
 The Vale, Portishead volunteers

Meetings were held with the following Towns and Parishes

Date	Town or Parish Council
27/11/2019	Portishead Town Council
11/12/2019	Nailsea Town Council
9/1/2020	Weston super Mare Town Council
15/1/2020*	Locking Parish Council Hutton Parish Council Wick St Lawrence Parish Council Banwell Parish Council Winscombe Parish Council Kewstoke Parish Council
16/1/2020*	Long Ashton Parish Council Kingston Seymour Parish Council Kenn Parish Council Brockley Parish Council Flax Bourton Parish Council
22/1/2020	Clevedon Town Council

*All Parish Councils were invited to attend one meeting

The following external communications were made

News releases:

Date	News release	Resulting Coverage
29 Oct 2019	https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/news/rewilding-programme-to-help-tackle-climate-emergency/	Bristol Live and Weston Mercury
13 Nov 2019	https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/news/have-your-say-on-rewilding-programme/	Somerset Live , Bristol Live , North Somerset Times - picked up that former golf course in Portishead is one of the proposed sites North Somerset Times – covered comments made at COCO
19 Nov 2019	https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/news/actions-to-tackle-climate-emergency/	Weston Mercury ,
6 Dec 2019	https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/news/good-response-to-rewilding-consultation/	
7 Jan 2020	https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/news/get-involved-in-tackling-climate-emergency/	North Somerset Times ,
4 Feb 2020	https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/news/first-trees-to-be-planted-as-rewilding-gets-under-way/	North Somerset Times , Weston Mercury ,

Social media posts:

Date	Post	Analytics
29 Oct 2019	We are looking to plant 50,000 young trees in North Somerset as part of our rewilding programme to help tackle the climate emergency. We will also be allowing the grass to grow taller in some areas to create new habitats for wildlife. http://ow.ly/cWc330pNrYz	Facebook: 8,505 reach / 217 reactions, comments & shares Twitter: 3,070 impressions, 90 engagements
13 Nov 2019	We're now consulting on our rewilding programme. It's your chance to have your say on the sites we've identified for planting trees or allowing the grass to grow. You can also suggest other locations and volunteer to get involved in the project. Go to http://ow.ly/OdCs30pSN1B	Facebook: 3,982 reach / 68 reactions, comments & shares Twitter: 2,985 impressions, 80 engagements
6 Dec 2019	More than 70 people have already said they would like to be involved in our rewilding programme which will create more habitats for wildlife, increase biodiversity and help tackle the climate emergency. Find out how you can get involved at http://ow.ly/TkSp30pZEPp	Facebook: 5,278 reach / 61 reactions, comments & shares Twitter: 1,548 impressions, 36 engagements
7 Jan 2020	There's still time to have your say and get involved in our plans to tackle the climate emergency including our ambitious rewilding programme across North Somerset http://ow.ly/49ed30q7qlp	Facebook: 3,439 reach / 44 reactions, comments & shares Twitter: 1,596 impressions, 16 engagements
4 Feb 2020	We're looking for volunteers to help plant 5,000 trees this month as part of our rewilding programme across North Somerset. Find out where and when we're planting at http://ow.ly/akSY30qeUW9	Facebook: 37,154 reach / 939 reactions, comments & shares Twitter: 3,690 impressions, 175 engagements

North Somerset Life magazine:

- Mentioned in 'Action on climate crisis' double page spread p26/27

North Somerset Life digital news digest:

- ['Have your say on rewilding sites'](#) – November 2019
- ['Views sought on plans to tackle climate emergency'](#) – January 2020

12. Internal comms

Members Only, newsletter for councillors:

- [Issue 197, 22 November 2019, p3](#)

Saturday 15 February

Watchhouse Hill, Pill - 9am (188 trees) meet at the site car park on The Green
Badger Rise, Portishead - 1.30pm (234 trees) meet by the play area on nightingale rise

Sunday 16 February

Robin Place, Portishead - 9am (104 trees) junction of Robin Place and Wagtail Crescent (BS20 7PX)
Central Park, Burlington Road, Portishead - 9.30am (116 trees) meet at the Rusty Ladies
Halletts Way, Portishead - 12.30pm (162 trees) meet at the play area on Halletts Way

Monday 17 February

Chestnut Grove, Clevedon - 10am (588 trees) meet at the gate at the end of chestnut grove

Tuesday 18 February

Bournville rec – 9.30am (150 trees) meet at the community centre/boxing club
Locking Moor Road, Locking - 1pm (120 trees) lay-by between helicopter museum roundabout and Elm Tree Road

Wednesday 19 February

Arnolds Way, Yatton - 10am (116 trees) meet at the corner of Brunel Way and Arnolds way
Hutton Moor, Weston - 1pm (269 trees) meet in Hutton Moor car park by the field gate

Thursday 20 February

Cricket Field, Poppy Close, Wick St Lawrence - 10am (379 trees) meet behind the Ebdon arms on the open space

Friday 21 February

Jubilee Park, Weston - 10am (82 trees) meet at the entrance to the park from Windwhistle lane

Saturday 22 February

Pound Lane, Nailsea - 9.30am (289 trees) meet at the end of the cul de sac to Moor end Spout (BS48 2Da)
Rhyne View, Nailsea - 2.30pm (85 trees) meet at the main open space at Rhyne View

Sunday 23 February

Sedgemoor Close, Nailsea - 9.30am (302 trees) Field gate at the end of Sedgemoor Close
Trendlewood Way Park, Nailsea - 2.30pm (60 trees) Near the croquet club at Birdlip close

Tuesday 25 February

Elm Farm, Wraxall - 9am (332 trees) meet at the main field gate on Lodge Lane

Wednesday 26 February

Powis Close, Weston - 9.30am (143 trees) meet at the end of the cul de sac at Powis close
Castle Batch, Weston - 1pm (109 trees) meet at castle batch car park

Thursday 27 February

Scot Elm Drive, Weston - 10am (195 trees) meet at the entrance to the school on Scot Elm Drive

Saturday 29 February

Lynch Farm, Weston - 9.30am (211 trees) meet at the path from Rossendale Close

Silverberry, Weston - 2pm (104 trees) meet on the open space from Verbena Way

Sunday 1 March

Locking Road, Weston - 9.30am (215 trees) meet at the corner of Baytree View and Locking Road

Ashcombe Park, Weston - 2pm (115 trees). Meet by the bottom play area within Ashcombe Park