

North Somerset Council

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE ORGANISATION POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE OF MEETING: JULY 2020

SUBJECT OF REPORT: RE-WILDING – UPDATE REPORT

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 update of the re-wilding programme and to help identify areas for improvement for future phases.

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report provides an ongoing update to the Council's re-wilding project and follows on from two previous reports made on 3 March 2020 and 5 November 2019.

The report will describe 'lessons learned' and seek additional comments from Members to help ensure that the delivery of future phases continually improve. The report will also describe two significant events that have negatively impacted the first phase of re-wilding and seeks guidance on responding to objections to re-wilding from local residents. A revised programme for re-wilding is also presented.

2. POLICY

Climate change emergency
Council re-wilding motion

3. DETAILS

Since the last report was presented the re-wilding project has experienced two significant impacts:

1. COVID 19

2. Driest spring since records began

Both these issues have affected the success rate of the trees planted during February 2020 in our first phase of re-wilding.

COVID 19 prevented us from mobilising the volunteers to help the trees get established. We could not therefore arrange for volunteers to help with maintenance tasks that aid establishment such as watering, weeding and mulching.

North Somerset weather data for winter 2019 and spring 2020 is described in Appendix A. In summary, winter 2019-20 saw 130% – 170% of average winter rainfall totals with February being particularly wet and stormy and included three named storms with widespread high rainfall totals. Spring 2020 has been the fifth warmest and driest spring on record for the UK overall with May being the driest on record (only 17% of the monthly average).

We therefore planted the trees in one of the wettest Februarys on record which made the job quite difficult, but we could not have forecasted that the spring would be so dry. This has been a particular problem because spring is the time of year when plants, especially newly planted ones, need maximum resources to flourish. Water is obviously a key element of this and so this drought really affected the establishment of the trees. We implemented a watering programme, but it was not able to reverse the effects of the drought.

Typically, landowners would expect a death rate of about 30% for whip planting but we estimate that this may be as high as 80% at some locations. Such extremes of weather in such a short period of time illustrates climate change and how it impacts the natural environment.

The revised timetable below updates current progress and introduces a programme that brings forward tall grass management.

Phase	Activity	Notes	Time period
1	5000 trees to be planted	This was completed Spring 2020	Complete
2	Tall grass management	Initially a small pilot project was proposed that would introduce tall grass management. However, this was expanded at the start of the growing season and we have now created 100,000 m ² of tall grass (25% of the project's total).	Summer 2020
3	20,000 trees to be planted	Sites will be evaluated during the summer 2020 for this phase. This may be subject to COVID 19 restrictions. Dead trees from the areas planted in 2020 will be replaced where appropriate.	Winter 2020/21
4	Tall grass management areas created	The remaining 300,000m ² of tall grass will be created bringing forward the project by one year.	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	New areas for tall grass will be added to the amenity grass programme.	Summer 2022
7	Expand re-wilding beyond amenity grass	New sites will need to be identified that are suitable for re-wilding	Ongoing

Despite the widespread consultation, some residents were unaware that nearby open space was being re-wilded. In future, notices will be erected where re-wilding is going to be introduced.

A related issue is that some residents do not want nearby open space to become re-wilded and Officers would value guidelines on how to respond to such objections.

COVID 19 has interrupted our relationship with the re-wilding volunteers and we will be seeking to re-establish that during the remainder of 2020.

4. CONSULTATION

Residents were consulted on the introduction of re-wilding of amenity grass areas and information relating to the consultation can be found here (<https://n-somerset.inconsult.uk/consult.ti/rewilding/consultationHome>)

Letters to residents surrounding the proposed site has been proposed but this has two disadvantages. Firstly, 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

Costs for future tree planting are currently being calculated.

Costs for tall grass management are incorporated within the 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.

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 and tall grass management is delivered ensuring existing paths are retained guaranteeing that access opportunities will not change.

10. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

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

11. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

None

AUTHOR

John Flannigan, Community and Environment Service Manager

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Weather Data for Winter 2019-20 and Spring 2020

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

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

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

Appendix A

Weather Data - Winter 2019-20 and Spring 2020

Weather Data - Winter 2019-20 and Spring 2020

According to UK Met Office Data, winter 2019-20 was the fifth wettest winter since records began in 1862.

In North Somerset winter 2019-20 saw 130% – 170% of average winter rainfall totals. February was particularly wet and stormy and included three named storms with widespread high rainfall totals.

By contrast, Spring 2020 has been the sunniest spring on record (data since 1929) and also exceeds the sunshine amount for most summer seasons, with only three summers being sunnier (1976, 1989 and 1995).

Spring 2020 has been the fifth warmest and driest spring on record for the UK overall. May 2020 has been the sunniest calendar month on record (with 266 hours of sunshine, previous high was 265 in June 1957) and the driest May on record, with just 17% of the monthly average rainfall totals.

North Somerset saw more than 135% of the average spring sunshine duration and less than 20% of the average May rainfall amount.

