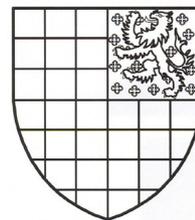


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**LEWES
TOWN
COUNCIL**

MINUTES

of the meeting of the **Working Party** formed to consider **Highway Verge Maintenance** held on **Thursday 15th November 2018**, in the **Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lewes** at **7:00pm**.

PRESENT Cllrs Catlin; Makepeace; Murray (S); O’Keeffe and Renton

In attendance: S Brigden (*Town Clerk [TC]*)

HVMWP2018/01 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN: Cllr R O’Keeffe was elected as Chairman of the Working Party for the 2018/19 year.

HVMWP2018/02 QUESTIONS: There were none.

HVMWP2018/03 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Apologies had been received from Cllr Lamb, who had a work commitment.

HVMWP2018/04 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: There were none

HVMWP2018/05 REMIT of the WORKING PARTY:

Members attention was drawn to the remit of the Working Party, extended by Council at its meeting on 21st June 2018:

Lewes Town Council meeting 21st June 2018 - Minute extract

Minute FC2018/19 refers:

FC2018/19.2 The minutes of the Meeting of the Highways Verges Working Party on 3rd April 2018 are noted (*copy in minute book*) and its recommendations are agreed.

FC2018/19.3 The cost of £2,643 for two additional cuts to highway verges within Lewes in 2018/19 is accepted and will be funded from the earmarked reserve shown in accounts as ‘R8: Environmental Enhancement’ (*balance b/fwd at April 2018 £19,370*)

FC2018/19.4 **The remit of the Highways Verges Working Party is extended for the remainder of this year in order to investigate the management of wildflower verges, working with ESCC Highways and their advisers.**

HVMWP2018/06 BUSINESS OF THE MEETING:

1 Members welcomed James Newmarch, Senior Asset Engineer at East Sussex County Council (ESCC); Joanna Carter, Chair of Wildflower Lewes (WfL), the community group who had been working with ESCC on distribution of natural species across the town; two members of WfL; Dr John Parry of the Railway Land Wildlife Trust and Kim Dawson, Specialist Advisor (Downland and Reserves) at Lewes District Council.

2 The Chairman clarified the purpose of the meeting, which was to discuss the management of wildflower verges as highlighted on the Agenda, not to revisit the matter of cutting frequency. The Town Council had responded to ESCC’s offer of a ‘menu’ and paid for two cuts in 2018/19 in addition to the ESCC default of two, on Lewes town verges except those previously-agreed as ‘Wildflower areas’. It was understood that the option of four cuts would not be offered in future as ESCC could not accommodate the complexity of scheduling county-wide.

3 Mr Newmarch explained the distinctions his section applied to areas generally referred-to as ‘Wildflower verges’:

Meadow verges were cut once with special attention paid to the after-treatment

Wildlife verges had special considerations both floras and fauna

Wait-and-see’ verges were left to nature

Regardless of status, all verges were maintained so as to ensure clear lines-of-sight for drivers at junctions. He said that the two-cut regime addressed ESCC's biodiversity duties. Species 'baseline surveys' determined the appropriate regime and ESCC held a significant amount of data, gathered by WfL, which indicated 40-50 desirable species were evident in many areas without special management.

4 WfL members present wished to "let nature back" at all verges. They stated that immediate action was required and that decisions should not "appease those who want a manicured finish". This, it was said, was a matter of educating the public and reference was made to progress on a South Downs-town link to be named "Tingles Way" that would join Egrets Way. Behind these lay a broader eco-tourism initiative. The Railway Land Wildlife Trust was helping to educate the public in a number of ways.

5 It was commented that there was a significant percentage of the populace who feel that infrequent mowing gave an appearance that the community did not care about its own town. WfL consider that such perceptions can be addressed by media coverage to promote the background and reassure that the environment is not simply being ignored. It was moot that this would not assist with any visitors who might form such an opinion on first entering the town. The perception might be ameliorated if uncut verges exhibited a mown border, to show that there was planned management. Mr Newmarch explained that managed edges should be incorporated in the 'two-cut regime', certainly on all larger verges, but that contractors had not been clear as to their instructions. This should now be established practice. It was agreed that the Town Council would be recommended to support the 'two-cut regime', with the proviso that mown edges were maintained, to exhibit positive management and counter perceptions of neglect.

6 The science regarding the advisability of removing grass cuttings following any mowing of a 'wildflower' verge was said to be "not definitive". It was often considered that leaving the arisings would enrich the soil and hamper the establishment of species and varieties that prefer low nutrient levels. There was, however, long-standing contention to this view in academic circles and it had been demonstrated that there was often little appreciable effect.

7 There was discussion about desirable species, and WfL promoted the sowing of Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*). WfL thought that they could obtain Yellow Rattle seed from local sources and were prepared to distribute it using their volunteers. It was noted that grants may be available from a number of sources, to assist with any costs. In answer to a question, it was recognized that such a programme would be for agreement between ESCC and WfL. Further advice could be sought from specialists at Kew Royal Botanic Gardens' facility at Wakehurst Place, the Millennium Seed Bank, the largest wild seed conservation project in the world.

HVMWP2018/07

CONCLUSIONS:

Council would be asked to note these discussions; to support the sowing of species such as Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) and recognize the importance of public education in the matter.

It was agreed that the Town Council would be recommended to support the 'two-cut regime', with the proviso that mown edges were maintained on larger verges, to exhibit positive management and counter perceptions of neglect. A map was to be defined.

HVMWP2018/08

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and declared the meeting closed.

The meeting closed at 8:40pm

Signed:

Date: