

**TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
BUDGET AND POLICY COMMITTEE**

**BRIEFING NOTE
ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MOWING OF COUNCIL LAND**

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council is responsible for the management of various sites which involve the cutting of grass and vegetation through the growing season. This is typically undertaken on a as/when required basis, reflecting the varying impacts of seasonal changes, weather patterns, soil type, location, ecological value, accessibility, usage, vegetation type etc. Note – this report does not apply to Whitchurch Down which has separate management arrangements.
- 1.2 In addition 'No Mow May' was an initiative started in 2019 by a conservation charity called Plantlife. Plantlife's campaign encourages people to resist the temptation to create perfectly cultivated lawns and open spaces, and instead allow grass and plants to grow more freely for a month ahead of the summer period, both to tackle pollution and support local wildlife.
- 1.3 There is now a growing movement to extend No Mow May into early July in order to create a bigger impact on local wildlife. However, statistics show by letting grass grow naturally for just one month a radical difference can be made. For example, just eight dandelions produce enough nectar to support an adult bumblebee's essential energy needs.
- 1.4 Due to a lack of suitable habitats the UK is suffering a serious issue with the significant decline in pollinators. Studies report the UK has seen a 97% decline in flower-rich meadows since the 1930s. Of course, there are many other factors involved, including agriculture, the increase in pesticides, and more generally climate change reducing locations that are suitable for nesting and breeding.

2. THE CURRENT SITUATION

- 2.1 There is an increasing expectation on Councils to support the No Mow May campaign and make long-term commitments to transforming their management of road verges and green spaces in order to restore native wildflowers and support pollinators.

- 2.2 Council's who have signed up to the No Mow May campaign include Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council, Illogen Parish Council, Calstock Parish Council.
- 2.3 To date the Town Council has not officially adopted a policy in regard to No Mow May.
- 2.4 In practice though, where possible spring wildflowers are left to bloom throughout the council's estate (primarily Dolvin Road Cemetery, Plymouth Road Cemetery (old section & wildflower burial meadow), Canal Bank, and Verges) before those areas are cut. The rest of the grounds are managed from April onwards. In 2023 and 2024 an increased footprint in Plymouth Road cemetery was included within the areas to be left due to a significant increase in the spread of the wildflowers as well as nests / habitats. For the first time this year native wild orchids have established in the cemetery and the Works Department have seen an increase in hedgehogs.
- 2.5 In 2021 the Council, working in partnership with Tavistock Community Gardener's adopted the Blue Campaign. The Blue Campaign is a nationwide group that supports rewilding of Council land and private gardens. Areas managed under this initiative include: Canal Bank, Westbridge bank, Mrs Wedd's Arboretum, St Johns Walk, Sections of Bensons Meadow, Plantations, Market Road Riverbank.
- 2.6 The Town Council received two complaints in 2024 due to the length of the grass in the older sections of the Plymouth Road Cemetery which the complainants advised prohibited them from visiting graves. Please note due to staff capacity issues the Works Department were behind on grass cutting by approx. 2-3 weeks this year.

3. WORKING SOLUTIONS

- 3.1 The Works Manager would suggest a clear policy on the development and management of those of the town's green open spaces and cemeteries under its control to include, where appropriate, commitment to initiatives such as No Mow May, the Blue Campaign and other rewilding projects which align with the Town Councils' core objectives (and fit with resources/capacity) and promote bio-diversity. That would include reviewing current areas identified for reduced cutting or similar / where wildflowers are established.
- 3.2 Should a formalised approach be adopted going forward, the Works Manager recommends clear signage is installed to inform the general public. As well as a press release, and website / social media posts.

- 3.3 The Works Manager recommends a tailored approach to cutting in the older sections of Plymouth Road Cemetery

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 Subject to any feedback from the Committee/Council, the Works Manager prepare a report setting out - along the lines listed above, potential arrangements in connection for the management by way of cutting of its green open spaces, verges and cemeteries.
- 4.2 The instructions of the Committee and Council are sought.

**BECKY ROWE
WORKS MANAGER
JULY 2024**