

MARLOW TOWN COUNCIL

Court Garden, Pound Lane, Marlow, Bucks

MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD IN THE TOWN COUNCIL OFFICE, COURT GADEN HOUSE, MARLOW ON TUESDAY 21ST FEBRUARY 2023 DIRECTLY AFTER THE FULL PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION MEETING

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| Present: | Chairman | Cllr J Towns |
| | Councillors | Cllr N Marshall Cllr C Hoyle Cllr C Stapley Cllr D Brown |
| | Town Clerk Admin | Hilary Martin Debbie Abbott |
| | Also present | 1 member of the public |

ESW.01.23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

ESW.02.23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

ESW.03.23 MINUTES DATED 09.08.2022

INFORMATION

The minutes of the previous meeting dated the 09.08.2023 were presented by Cllr J Towns and agreed as a true record.

ESW.04.23 WILD VERGES PROJECT

DECISION

It is proposed that Marlow Town Council develop wildflower verges on some of the side roads of Marlow this year. This will mean the chosen areas will be cut 3 times this year and the arisings will be collected at each cut. The majority of verges in Marlow, open spaces, parks and the town cemetery will remain on their usual cutting regime. The purpose of this endeavour is to provide sustenance to pollinating insects. The environment that insects need has decreased dramatically over the last 50 years and pollinators are vital to the whole planet ecosystem. There are approximately 1,500 pollinating insects in the UK of which there has been between a 20% and 50% decline in some species.

The drive for this comes from the UK government, Buckinghamshire County Council, the Town Council Environment Committee, and some residents. The UK government is encouraging local authorities to develop more wild verges. Buckinghamshire County Council are leading a county wide initiative to leave grass verges uncut and develop wildflowers on them.

Marlow Town Council have responsibility for the grass cutting and there are three options to manage this project.

1. Choose a small number of small grass areas that can be left for wildflower management this year. This would allow the Council to monitor both the growth of the verge and how it responds to 3 cuts a year. It would also allow Council to gather feedback from residents as there would be enough sites for the project to be visible.
2. Choose all side roads but keep the main roads cut on a monthly basis. This would mean the main roads in would look smart which may be preferable as the road traffic is heavier and more visitors travel along these roads.
3. Choose the main roads in and have the side roads cut on a regular basis which would be a clear sign to all residents and visitors to Marlow that the town is keen on making an effort for the environment.

Note: We do not expect wildflowers to appear in abundance for the first couple of years so the appearance will be long grass for part of the growing season. Cutting the coarse grass and removing the cuttings will decrease the fertility of the soil therefore making it more difficult for coarse grass to grow and easier for fine grass and flowers to grow. It is fine grass and wildflowers that will increase bio diversity year on year.

4. The above options are to be managed naturally which means allowing the flowers to seed naturally through cutting management. Options 1 - 3 are all cost neutral. The Council can also buy native wildflower seeds and have the maintenance contractor roll them in to the chosen areas. This would cost between £1,000 to £4,000 depending on the size of area decided on.

Benefits

The town gains from this project by contributing enormously to the local and national environment. Plant life and insect life will benefit significantly from developing wildflower verges. The local Environmental groups are of course very supportive of this endeavour. We do not have information on the wider response of the town residents. However, on an anecdotal note, the office keeps a log of all resident feedback on grounds maintenance and last year was the first year that we had 5 calls recorded complaining about how much we cut the grass and that it should be left to develop wildflowers for the bees.

Below is a list of benefits to the wildflower project that Marlow Town Council is developing:

1. Supporting insect life and addressing the decline in bio diversity, one road at a time. One mile of flower rich verge can provide up to 20kg of flower nectar which can feed millions of pollinating insects.
2. There are health benefits to the residents. More greenery on the roadside offers more counterbalance to the exhaust fumes. Along with Releaf Marlow's efforts to increase roadside trees, the greenery at the roadside will really increase.
3. This will raise awareness amongst those residents whose focus may not be primarily on environmental change. It would be fantastic if individuals were inspired by our efforts to do something constructive for the environment within their own lives.
4. Greater collaboration and a stronger working relationship with our ground's maintenance contractor. We are working together to trial this as an experiment that both parties want to succeed.
5. The project is bringing together many community groups as this aim overlaps almost all the community groups. This project has served to highlight how important re wilding is to so many people in Marlow. While each community

group has a slightly different focus and aim, all of them agree that not cutting the grass is a great idea.

Publicity and communication to residents

It is strongly recommended that the Council issue some substantial, clear and positive information as soon as a decision has been made. We can communicate through various news websites, papers and magazines. We can explain why we are doing this, the benefits to the residents and the redirection of funds. It is not a cost cutting exercise, it is an environmental drive.

Signage in the verges to clearly explain that the grass is being left on purpose.

Recommended

That members recommend to Council to proceed with option 2 and that the Wild verges project proceeds on a one-year trial.

Resolution

That members form a small working group to work with Officers in identifying areas that can be used for the wild verge project and for this to be presented at the next TC meeting on March 7th. Cllr C Stapley, Cllr D Brown and Cllr J Towns agreed to be part of the working group.

ESW.05.23 WILD MARLOW BEE FESTIVAL

DECISION

Marlow Town Council have already committed to make Marlow England's first Bee Town. Last year Wild Marlow held a very successful bee festival, that they will repeat this year and would like Marlow Town Council to attend and exhibit. The date has been agreed for Saturday 15th July in Higginson Park.

The Aims of the Festival are to:

- Make Marlow England's first Bee Town
- Involve the entire community
- Underline Marlow's commitment to the environment
- Provide focus for further positive environmental changes

MTC Have already committed to:

- a long-term pollination policy
- continue to create bee-friendly areas
- instigate bee-friendly cutting regimes
- eliminate use of Glyphosate by MTC contractors
- support our approach to Bucks Council/other parishes
- support PR campaign and 'Bee Town' signage

Bee Festival is confirmed for Saturday, 15th July 2023 in Higginson Park

This year's event takes place later in the year than last, in order to ensure the best display of pollinator-friendly planting in Higginson Park and around the town. With warmer temperatures, more bees will be around, and our bee-friendly plants will be even more popular. Bumblebee walks, which were planned in 2022 but were not possible due to empty flowerbeds and a lack of suitable planting nearby, we hope will be feasible this year, and the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, which runs the walks, has already agreed to attend the event.

The format will be similar to last year's, and stallholders will be offered free attendance once again.

Marlow Town Council's involvement

As part of its commitment to being England's first Bee Town, Marlow Town Council are invited to be a key exhibitor at the Bee Festival this year. Council did not take part last year as the date was not feasible with the Jubilee event. Stall holder participation is free, a gazebo will be required, agree messaging, agree a giveaway such as wildflower seeds and Bee boxes.

Information from Wild Marlow's Bee Festival in 2022

Wild Marlow's first Bee Festival took place in Higginson Park on Saturday 4th June, and provided the ideal launch-pad for the announcement of Marlow as the first Bee Town in England.

The event celebrated the importance of bees to the town and showcased Wild Marlow's work to support these important creatures.

Despite some exhibitors pulling out at the last minute due to the Jubilee weekend celebrations, the event was a great success, with over 20 stallholders attending, including:

High Wycombe Beekeepers Association

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Chiltern Bees

Wild Marlow (x 4):

- Info, membership, Much Wilder Marlow, card sales, bee B&Bs
- Bee friendly planting for gardens
- Bee frieze, colour a bee
- Make a bee hotel

Creature Candy, Pottery, Stokesy Art, Bombus the Bee books, Strawberry Grove, RSPE Crafts, Twenty Three Living, Manuka Jewellery, Little Muddy Boots

Timed to coincide with the Marlow Farmers' Market, visitor attendance was high, and despite cold and windy weather there was a steady flow of people to the stands and to the activity tent in the centre of the event throughout the day. (Precise footfall is not available).

Storytelling, face painting, bumblebee walks, bee hotel building, Marlow Rocks around the town, bee-friendly planting, colour in a bee for a bee frieze – these were the kinds of activities that took place during the day. All were highly popular with Marlow families and visitors, and Wild Marlow benefited from a high number of new members signing up on the day.

Anecdotal feedback shows that visitors were delighted and impressed with the event, with many spending time there participating in activities and meeting friends. Stallholder feedback was extremely positive. A significant number have already signed up for 2023's event, and we're planning similar kinds of activities. The event is free to stallholders, although those who sell well are invited to make a contribution to Wild Marlow at the end of the day.

Pre- and post-publicity was considerable, with articles, news releases and a video recording by Steve Backshall in support of the event.

Recommended.

That members agree to recommend that Marlow Town Council have a presence at this year's Bee Festival on July 15th. Budget, plan and officer involvement to be presented to the next TC meeting on March 7th.

Resolved

Members agreed to recommend to full Council to have a presence at this year's Bee Festival on July 15th, 2023. Budget, plan and officer involvement to be presented at the next TC meeting on March 7th.

ESW.06.23 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

INFORMATION

Tuesday 4th April 2023 directly after the Plans only meeting.

Signed:(Chairman) Date: