

COUNCIL – 29 JULY 2021

NOTICES OF MOTION – SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

Executive Summary

Following the publication of the agenda for the Council meeting on 29 July 2021 but before the deadline of midday on Thursday, 22 July 2021, the following Notices of Motion were received. Details of a Notice of Motion received from Councillor Barker were published with the Agenda.

2. Councillor A Kirby

“Pollinator Plan for Woking

This Council notes the systemic importance of pollinators to our food supply and economy, as well as their intrinsic value to nature in Woking Borough. This Council also notes the success and popularity elsewhere across the UK of the ‘No Mow May’ campaign, during which grass verges were left undisturbed by mowing during this critical month for flowers, wildlife and pollinators in particular.

The Council acknowledges the existing local work in this area of the ‘Planet Woking’, ‘Woking Environment Action Group’ and other voluntary organisations, in supporting bees and other pollinators through the sowing and planting of wildflowers. The Council recognises the importance of wild meadow spaces to the public realm, residents’ enjoyment of the Borough – and the benefits to the visual appeal of our communities.

The Council also acknowledges the success of its own existing wildflower strategies, which have so far been run on a more site-specific basis.

Accordingly, this Council resolves to instruct Officers to arrange for a broad and Borough-wide set of policies, classifying our grass cutting activities in each location according to the frequency of mowing required. This should result in a set of Borough-wide ‘wildness grades’ associated with different levels of mowing.

This system should be designed to achieve four key things:

- 1) Maximise the level of diverse wild flora and fauna in all council-maintained grassland, with the first assumption for maximum biodiversity
- 2) Continue to ensure public safety and amenity where essential (such as sports pitches or road verges)
- 3) Create an easily understandable set of ‘wildness grades’ to enable residents to understand and engage with the Council’s grass cutting policies
- 4) Allow Council contractors to refocus on keeping public footpaths clear of vegetation

This Council resolves that the vast majority of grassland within this scheme will be left unmown during the entire period 1st May – 1st June, excluding only the most exceptional of locations within the ‘least’ wild category, as outlined for exceptional reasons of safety or public utility mentioned above. Beyond this initial distinction of inclusion in the ‘No Mow May’ principle, further grades of reduced cutting should be considered – up to and including a policy in some locations of cutting grass only once per year in August.

Council instructs Officers and the relevant Portfolio Holder to create a clear set of such 'wildness grades' for Woking grassland and to allocate all grassy areas maintained by Woking Borough Council to one of these 'grades' – with a preference for the most wild to suit each location.

Council also resolves that Officers should report back to Full Council at their earliest convenience with estimates of the potential net savings from such a systematic and organised policy of reduced grass-cutting, so that all Councillors can debate the best use of these savings for other purposes."

3. Councillor A Kirby

"Freedom to vote by post

This Council believes that democracy is best secured by maximising electoral turnout and participation, as much as that democracy must start by more literally securing residents' votes.

It is therefore with regret that this Council notes the proportion of people voting by post in the Borough did not rise between 2019 and 2021, despite this year's elections being the first to be held since the arrival of Covid-19. Despite the understandable caution from residents around in-person events – and for many even medically-advised isolation – the proportion of local people voting by post in fact fell.

In light of these facts, this Council recognises its responsibility to better uphold and inspire democratic participation through challenging times. This Council also recognises the importance and legal status of the fully independent Electoral Commission.

This Council notes that Woking Borough is an outlier in asking residents already on the electoral register for photo-identification in order to support their application for a postal vote, contrary to official guidance and legal requirements as set out by the Electoral Commission.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

- 1) Reflect the latest exact wording used by the Electoral Commission on its own website, when describing the process of registering to vote by post, on all relevant communications whether in print, digital or in person.
- 2) Remove all other restrictions, suggestion of restriction, advice to follow legally unnecessary steps, or any other effective impediment created by the Council's advice or processes, on the ability of residents to register for a postal vote.
- 3) Proactively communicate this change to residents, via all Council-controlled media channels and to issue a public statement to all local media on behalf of this Full Council, clarifying the change and the exact contents of this motion."

Background Papers: None.

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Notices of Motion – Supplementary Report

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REPORT ENDS

