

In accordance with Rule No. 3.3.2 the following questions were submitted to the Council from members of the public:

(i) Darrell Pointing

‘If Newark & Sherwood District Council are as green as they claim to be, can you please tell me why you don’t have a policy of leaving road and path verges along with large areas of open grass to grow naturally during the wildflower season to help bees and other flora and fauna survive. If you are worried about some of the short grass and straight lines brigade getting upset you could get your contractors / groundsmen to cut a narrow strip adjacent to pathways and roads showing that the grass areas are still being managed by the council. This would not only be of great help to wildlife but would save a great deal of resources and energy (fuel) leading to a saving in taxpayers money and help to combat climate change. This is already common practice with many Councils.’

Reply from Councillor Roger Jackson – Portfolio Holder for Cleaner, Safer, Greener

All public highway and path verges are the responsibility of the Highways department of Nottinghamshire County Council. Their remit is to ensure that grass verges are cut for road safety reasons rather than visual appearance. It is believed that they carry out cuts five cuts a year in urban areas and twice a year in rural areas. In urban areas the grass is cut to approximately 75mm and grass cuttings are not collected.

There are a number of verges which are deemed “conservation verges” due to the special flora and fauna they contain. These are only cut once a year, usually in September.

Their responsibility extends to ensuring that verges along all maintained roads meet the road safety standards. They carry out weed control twice a year, during the summer. The season is dictated by the requirement to have 3 consecutive dry days.

Any questions about extending the number of “conservation verges” should be directed towards Nottinghamshire County Council Highways department.

Nottinghamshire County Council will be undertaking a consultation this autumn called ‘Greener Highways’ which will ask for comments about grass verges. The County Council is aware of the public’s concern of how they maintain the verges and will be taking comments.

As far as open grassed areas under the control of NSDC we have a number of open spaces that have Wildflower Meadow Management ongoing. Sites such as:

Clay Lane, Newark
Newbury Road, Newark
Thorpe Oaks, Coddington
Barnby Road Play Area, Newark
Blidworth Church Cemetery
Ossington Church Yard
Bishops Drive Cemetery, Southwell

Boughton Open Space (HRA land)
Rainworth Open Water Meadow (HRA land)
Sconce & Devon Park, Newark
Sherwood Heath
Vicar Water Country Park

We have a number of nature reserves and SSSI sites within our care where our focus is on native woodland, heath and acid grassland. We are constantly increasing the areas of grass, managed as meadow in all our council owned green spaces, alongside specific tree planting projects undertaken to assist with our Climate Emergency response. For the second year NSDC has supported "No Mow May" where 20 sites within the district were allowed to grow throughout the month. Our annual participation in this event constantly reviewed and all feedback is closely monitored.

NSDC have "Green Flag" awards for four of its parks and we hope to retain these this year. These are nationally recognised awards judged by an expert team from Keep Britain Tidy. Judging criteria for these awards is extremely comprehensive and at least 25% of the marks are judged against environmental management and biodiversity, landscape and heritage of the site. The judges take notice of environmental impact, chemical use, peat use, climate change adoption strategies, management of natural features, wild fauna and flora, conservation of landscape features amongst many other things. These awards are also based on the fact that NSDC has robust management plans in place and is acting on those plans.

In addition to our own land, we currently hold Grounds Maintenance contracts with 12 Town and Parish Councils who control open spaces in many areas of the district. Our Service Level Agreements with these organisations contain practical advice and assistance in meadow management and also the reduction of herbicides.

Finally, 2022 will see the completion of a Wildflower Policy for all the open space managed within the district. Officers are currently finalising the content to be submitted for adoption which will see practical policies put in place for wildflower grass management in our parks, open spaces, cemeteries and housing grounds.

(ii) Jennifer Harding

I have read the Assurance Lincolnshire Audit Report - Titled "Lessons Learned", dated 27th June 2022. I would like to know who bears ultimate responsibility for the failures that lead to the lack of the following:-

- ☐ due diligence
- ☐ asset management plans and disposal plans
- ☐ public engagement
- ☐ public consultation
- ☐ evidence for the need for car parking
- ☐ a sound commercial case
- ☐ legal and financial opinions
- ☐ consideration of the environmental impact

And with reference to Para 1.28 on page 6 of the Audit Report, I ask similarly, who is ultimately responsible for the "deal" which cost the Council over £500,000 of tax-payers money?

Reply from Councillor David Lloyd – Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Performance & Finance

Thank you Jenni for your question. Given that you state that you have read the report then I can only assume you have misinterpreted its purpose and content. The focus of the report, as the title explicitly states, is upon learning and recommending procedural and practice change where necessary. It is not concerned with reprisals and recriminations.

Turning to your second question, assuming the first component was a question. Your own parentheses on the word "deal" apply an inference which is curious to me. You refer only to the financial cost, not environmental considerations which is intriguing given as you said you read the report and campaigned to save the trees. You will know from the report, previous reports to committees, and the campaign group's Freedom of Information requests that the Council was under a contractual obligation with a fixed date that required the removal of the trees. I am confused therefore that you seem to suggest that we should not have bought out the contract, that being the only means of saving the trees and now enabling the proposed improvements should public consultation be supportive.

Supplementary Question from Jennifer Harding

Quite obviously you didn't really understand my question and I don't really understand your reply, but it seems to me that nobody is ultimately going to be held responsible or held to account for what happened and I would ask you Councillor Lloyd how is justice served?

Response from Councillor David Lloyd

I can reread my initial reply, it doesn't vary.

(iii) Wendy Patterson

When Protect Newark Green Spaces' representatives met with Lucy Pledge and her colleagues at Assurance Lincolnshire, a range of issues were discussed which related to the substantial written submission PNGs had sent prior to the meeting. These included:

Freedom of Information process

Risk assessments given to contractors informing them that violence towards workers was a risk, including missile-throwing and drone-dropping

The behaviour of council contractors during the protests, including the health and safety concerns

Detailed review of the protest and actions taken

Complaints process

Protect Newark Green Spaces' representatives were told at the meeting that all these issues were within the scope of the inquiry. Who decided that they were not within its scope and when was that decision made?

Reply from Councillor David Lloyd – Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Performance & Finance

Thank you to Wendy for her question which by nature of what the content is we've had to be run past the Head of Assurance Lincolnshire, that being the organisation that conducted the audit. Via them it has been confirmed that indeed Wendy has raised the items listed in the question and when she met with them she was advised that these were not within scope of the review. On the contrary, the scope of the review, which was quite properly set by the Council's Statutory Officers, and this scope was shared with Wendy by Assurance Lincolnshire, both before the meeting in an email and at the meeting itself. It is also a matter of record that the issues that Wendy raises in her question are amongst those that she also raised in a complaint to the Ombudsman whereupon they too decided not to investigate.