



Monday, 7 October 2024

Report of Councillor Rhys Baker
Cabinet Member for Environment and
Waste

Rewilding – Ambitions

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

To provide an update in relation to South Kesteven District Council's rewilding ambitions.

Recommendations

In consideration of this report the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

1. Endorse the Council's plan to adopt rewilding initiatives on the trial sites which have been identified.
2. Recommend that the learning taken from the trial is captured and used to inform future rewilding plans across the district.
3. Agree to receive a future report on the outcome of the trial and future rewilding plans and initiatives.

| Decision Information | |
|---|--|
| Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication? | No |
| What are the relevant corporate priorities? | Connecting Communities Sustainable South Kesteven |
| Which wards are impacted? | All Wards |

Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

- 1.1 There are no significant financial implications arising from the introduction of the trial rewilding schemes identified within this report.
- 1.2 Should rewilding schemes be more widely implemented, it will be necessary to identify any costs in relation to any additional equipment which may be required as well as any potential savings to ensure these are reflected as part of future budget setting.

Completed by: Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and s151 Officer

Legal and Governance

- 1.3 There are no legal or governance implications arising from this report.

Completed by: James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Climate Change

- 1.4 The further introduction of rewilding schemes across the district presents an opportunity for the Council to increase biodiversity and work towards building a more resilient landscape to offset the impacts of climate change.

1.5 As well as the benefits in terms of biodiversity, rewilding is a nature-based solution to reducing the impact of greenhouse gasses on the environment as it presents an increased opportunity for the storage of carbon dioxide in vegetation and soil.

Completed by: Louise Case, Sustainability Project Support Officer

2. Background to the Report

2.1. The natural environment is facing a triple threat in terms of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. To combat this in September 2019 South Kesteven District Council formally declared a climate emergency and acknowledged the need to accelerate reductions in carbon emissions.

2.2. The South Kesteven District Council Corporate Plan (2024 – 2027) sets out the Council’s mission to meet the challenge of climate change and ensure a clean, green and healthy natural and built environment for present and future generations. This is under-pinned by an ambition to protect and enhance the natural environment and wildlife habitats, working to actively restore and rehabilitate damaged ecosystems.

2.3. A recent study by the Wildlife Trust has suggested that 90% of lowland grassland has been lost in the 20th century. This has contributed to a loss or reduction in insects, wildlife and grassland species which are an integral part of the UK’s ecological infrastructure.

2.4. Actively rewilding areas of land provides the opportunity to restore healthy ecosystems, improve biodiversity and reverse the loss of wildlife.

2.5. The area of South Kesteven covers 365 square miles and the Council delivers the maintenance of all Council owned land through its Street Scene team. In addition to General Fund and Housing Revenue Account open space, this includes the maintenance of three parks in Grantham, Grantham Cemetery, closed churchyards and sports pitches. In addition, the Street Scene team are contracted by Lincolnshire County Council to maintain the grass verges in Grantham.

2.6. This presents an opportunity for the Council to implement rewilding initiatives across the open public spaces it is responsible for. As well as contributing to the Council’s carbon efficiency targets this may also reduce the costs associated with maintaining these areas in the longer term.

2.7. When developing the Council’s plans for rewilding it must be recognised that the public open space the Council maintains is used by residents in different ways, including dog walking and for informal leisure and physical activity pursuits. The benefits of rewilding must be balanced with local community need to avoid negative perception and publicity.

2.8 The introduction of wildflower meadows on selected areas as a trial presents an opportunity to test the appetite of residents and raise awareness of the benefits of rewilding. The learning from the pilot scheme can also be evaluated to form part of the Council's future ambitions.

Existing Rewilding Sites:

2.9 There are pre-existing sites and examples of successful rewilding schemes across the district on land owned by the Council. This includes the following:

- A wildflower meadow has been established at Tattershall Drive, Market Deeping. This land is owned by the Council and maintained under licence by Deepings Lions.
- Queen Elizabeth Park is owned and maintained by the Council as a nature park and incorporates meadow and woodland areas. This was complemented and enhanced as part of the Witham/Slea Blue Green Corridor project which restored and improved the ecology of the River Witham and surrounding riverbanks and nearby green spaces.
- As part of the Blue Green Corridor work an area of meadow was incorporated into Dysart Park.
- The Heroes Orchard is adjacent to Wyndham Park and incorporates meadow and fruit trees, the area is maintained by volunteers.

Rewilding Trial Sites

2.10 Potential trial sites have been identified across the district where elements of rewilding can be incorporated. It is proposed to complement the rewilding schemes with the addition of wildflowers to ensure the areas are attractive from Spring 2025.

2.11 It is proposed that the trial sites will be publicised to ensure residents are aware of the benefits of rewilding and that the learning be captured to inform future plans for rewilding across the district. This will include notices and signage including a QR code which links to a specific webpage on the Council's website.

Bourne –Beaufort Drive/Rochester Drive:



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COUNCIL

Beaufort Drive Bourne

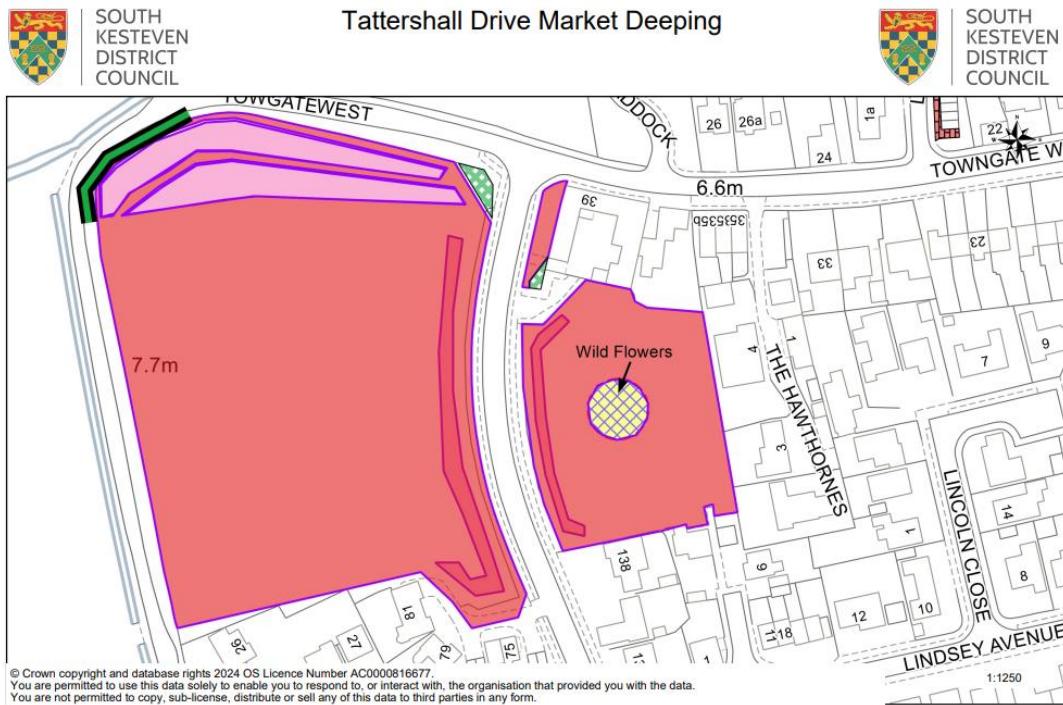


SOUTH
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DISTRICT
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- 2.12 The ground conditions in this area are susceptible to water logging. This makes the area ideal for focusing on the promotion of wetland wildflowers, and the presence of nearby water bodies supports the establishment of a diverse wetland habitat.
- 2.13 Should the trial be successful and no significant maintenance issues or negative public perception be identified, there is a potential to expand the rewilding initiative into adjacent green spaces to further enhance local biodiversity and create a substantial wildlife corridor.

Market Deeping – Tattershall Drive:



2.14 To complement the wildflower meadow located across the road it is proposed to plant wildflowers on a centre circle of Tattershall Drive to create a vibrant and natural habitat for bees, butterflies and other pollinators.

Stamford – Green Lane/Corporation Coppice:



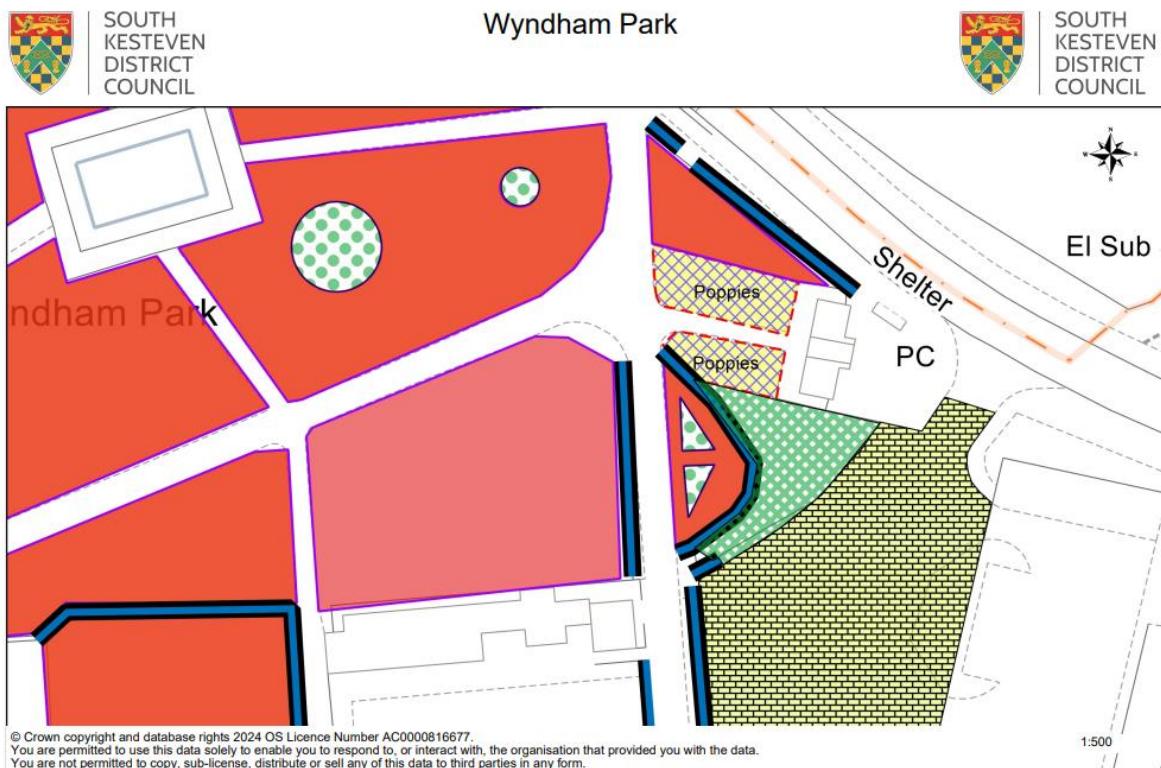
2.15 This area is adjacent to The Bluecoat School and therefore provides an excellent opportunity for outreach, allowing the public and school pupils to observe and learn about rewilding and its role in the ecosystem. If this trial is well received there is scope to extend rewilding along Green Lane and other adjacent public areas to create a larger network of green spaces.

South Witham Play Area – Great Close/Throughton Walk:



- 2.16 This location features two newly planted tree sections which presents an opportunity to add a complementary rewilding scheme to create a habitat that supports arboreal and ground level biodiversity. Wildflowers will be sown to provide ground cover and attract insects.
- 2.17 Should the trial prove successful additional rewilding areas could be introduced along Throughton Walk to link the tree sections and create a cohesive green space.

Wyndham Park – Grantham:



2.18 Wyndham Park is a World War 1 memorial park with heritage features and recently celebrated its 100-year anniversary. Given the park's historical context a section of the park near the entrance archway has been selected for rewilding and planting. This includes the inclusion of poppies and Attila Graffiti tulips which have been chosen as their colour matches the distinctive berets worn by British 1st Airborne Division in the battle of Arnhem.

Maintenance Considerations

2.19 In addition to the environmental benefits, the implementation of rewilding schemes also has the potential benefit of reducing the cost of the Street Scene service longer term.

2.20 Whilst the introduction of the meadow areas detailed in paragraph 2.9 has been extremely positive in environmental terms, the Council do not currently have the equipment necessary to maintain these areas and are currently buying in support to enable an annual cut to take place.

2.21 It has been identified that no specific equipment will be required to maintain any of the trial sites detailed within this report. However, given the costs of maintaining the meadows, any equipment to support this and future rewilding ambitions will need to be considered as part of the Council's budget round for financial year 2025/26.

Rewilding Menu:

- 2.22 In addition to the trial sites identified within this report, a successful bid to the Councils UK Shared Prosperity Fund by Officers in the Sustainability and Climate Change team has secured £40k of funding which is available for Parish and Town Councils to enable rewilding initiatives on their land.
- 2.23 To support this valuable initiative, a guide has been developed by the team to provide information and a menu of rewilding options which are eligible for funding. The guide also includes advice on the successful introduction of schemes and ongoing maintenance. By way of background information this is included at **Appendix One**.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 The introduction of rewilding schemes on land within the ownership of the Council presents an opportunity for the Council to contribute to the fight against climate change, as well as providing a range of associated benefits including the opportunity to reverse biodiversity loss, improve health and wellbeing outcomes, and achieve improvements to air, water and soil quality.
- 3.2 The sites selected for rewilding are currently maintained by the Council and have been chosen specifically to limit the impact on the local community surrounding the areas. It is hoped a successful trial, complemented by an awareness campaign, will provide a platform for wider consultation with a view to expanding rewilding across the district.
- 3.3 To support the trial a communications plan will be developed to ensure that the reasons for the introduction of rewilding and the associated benefits are clearly communicated.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 The Council could choose not to implement rewilding schemes on its land, but this does not support the previously declared climate emergency, or the ambitions set out within the Corporate Plan.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1. The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee are requested to endorse the trial sites selected for rewilding and continue to receive updates on the success of the trial and the Council's future plans in relation to rewilding.

6. Appendices

6.1 Appendix One – Rewilding Menu.