



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

13TH FEBRUARY 2020

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION IN CONSULTATION WITH COUNCILLOR RHYS LEWIS (CLIMATE CHANGE CHAMPION)

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Cabinet with the recommendations of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, which met on the 28th January 2020, to consider a report on the draft Wildflower Grass Management Policy for Rhondda Cynon Taf and a report on the action that can be taken in the Air Quality Management Areas, to ensure air quality improves across the County Borough.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the content of the two reports considered by the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group on the 28th January 2020, which are attached as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 to the report and;
- 2.2 Agree the recommendations of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group:
- I. To approve the Wildflower Grass Management Policy for Rhondda Cynon Taf
 - II. To continue progressing with the short-term and practicable actions identified in Table B of the Air Quality Management Areas report;
 - III. That having regard to the current local circumstances, the Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services work with the Group Director of Prosperity, Development and Frontline Services to identify the viable, long-term actions from Table B of the Air Quality Management Areas report, to include in the Council's Highway Capital Programme for Cabinet consideration; and
 - IV. That the Council seek to engage with its residents on the Clean Air Day, which is taking place on 20th June 2020, which is funded by the Welsh government and forms part of the wider Clean Air Day campaign across the UK.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To acknowledge the work of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group and their recommendations.

4. THE CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

- 4.1 The Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group met on the 28th January 2020, where they considered the following reports:

4.2 THE DRAFT WILDFLOWER GRASS MANAGEMENT POLICY FOR RHONDDA CYNON TAF.

- 4.3 In recent years, the loss of wildflower grassland habitats and the pollinating insects they support has become an issue of public concern. Publically owned grasslands and grass verges have significant potential as reservoirs of wildflower rich habitat that can contribute to reconnecting and restoring grassland biodiversity. As these areas are in public view, they also offer opportunities for awareness raising, local community support and action.

- 4.2 Following its consideration of the report on the [Council's Biodiversity](#) at its meeting in December 2019, the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group considered the report of the Group Director of Prosperity, Development and Frontline Services and the Director, Public Health, Protection and Community Services, which sought the Steering Group's feedback on the draft Wildflower Grass Management Policy for Rhondda Cynon Taf.

- 4.3 The Steering Group were informed that whilst biodiversity has been lost in certain parts of the UK, Rhondda Cynon Taf is fortunate to have a wide range of native wildflowers growing naturally in its fields, verges and woodlands. All of the plants are perfectly adapted to the soil, climate and habitat and are part of the 'ecosystem' providing food not only for pollinators but for many insects and other animals.

- 4.4 The Steering Group were in favour of the proposals to increase the number of sites in wildflower management and to establish a Biodiversity website, which would be used to engage the community by providing information and raise awareness.

- 4.5 Discussions ensued around the 'Grab a Rake' campaign, which had been devised to involve the local community in the management of some of the grass verges left for biodiversity. Members spoke positive of including the community in the campaign and the additional education value, commenting that community ownership is essential in raising awareness.

- 4.6 The Steering Group agreed that a clear message would need to be promoted to ensure that communities are fully aware that the uncut grass is a positive

measure. As such, Members were of the view that appropriate signage would need to be established at the sites.

4.7 Members of the Steering Group spoke of their own experiences with similar community initiatives and acknowledged that smaller, cost-effective schemes contribute to the wider agenda.

4.8 WHAT ACTION CAN BE TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT AREAS, TO ENSURE AIR QUALITY IMPROVES ACROSS THE COUNTY BOROUGH.

4.9 Poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the [UK](#) and is a public health priority for [Wales](#). It has been estimated that the annual mortality burden of human-made air pollution in the UK is 28,000 to 36,000 deaths every year, in comparison 20,000 deaths have been attributed to alcohol related diseases and obesity is currently believed to be responsible for more than 30,000 deaths every year. It is understood that often the most vulnerable within our communities are most at risk from the potential effects of air pollutants and perversely are more often likely to experience it.

4.10 The Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group considered the report of the Director, Public Health, Protection and Community Services. The report sought consideration of the action that can be taken in the Air Quality Management Areas, to ensure air quality improves across the County Borough.

4.11 The Steering Group were provided with examples of the 16 Air Quality Management areas identified within Rhondda Cynon Taf and were pleased to note that the majority of the Borough is believed to experience good air quality and that those areas identified were isolated hot spots. They were informed that very specific local circumstances can result in levels of Nitrogen Dioxide that can exceed an Air Quality Objective.

4.12 The Steering Group were informed of the grant funding, which had been utilised to deliver improved street lighting to serve the active travel access route to Pontypridd High School. It was acknowledged that the holistic, multi-agenda outcome approach had been essential and had benefited a number of agendas, including local engagement, active travel, air quality, climate change and biodiversity.

4.13 The Steering Group were referred to Appendix 1 of the report, where the individual Air Quality Action Plans were listed. A number of the improvements were considered to be practical in delivering short-term air quality improvement within the Air Quality Management Areas. However, the Steering Group acknowledged that the current transport related issues and infrastructure within RCT would not sufficiently support some of the long-term, sustainable actions identified. It was therefore recommended that discussions continue to take place between the Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services and the Group Director of Prosperity, Development and Frontline Services to identify the viable, long-term actions from Table B of the report, to include in the Council's Highway Capital Programme for Cabinet consideration.

- 4.14 Discussions ensued around community engagement and the Clean Air Day, which is taking place on 20th June 2020, which is funded by the Welsh government and forms part of the wider Clean Air Day campaign across the UK. The Steering Group felt that the Council's participation in the initiative would promote a positive message to its residents but agreed that the correct message would need to be conveyed, whether that be in respect of car sharing, cycling to work or tree planting.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 5.1 In respect of the draft Wildflower Grass Management Policy, the Council has a statutory biodiversity duty under S.6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and general responsibilities with regard to land management under various Acts including Highways legislation.
- 5.2 There are no legal implications aligned to the Air Quality Management Areas report.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no equality or diversity implications as a result of the recommendations set out within the report.

7. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 7.1 The draft Wildflower Grass Management Policy has been developed in consultation with Council staff who have responsibility and practical expertise in grassland management as well the Council's ecologist. Local residents and Councillors have contributed to the pilot projects, some being actively involved in 'Grab a Rake' to remove cuttings from small sites which are unsuitable for 'cut and collect' machinery.
- 7.2 There are no Consultation implications aligned to the Air Quality Management Areas report.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 8.1 Over the course of the next few years the Council will seek to realign its revenue and capital budgets to ensure that it has the financial resources to invest in major projects that can have a positive impact on reducing the Council's carbon footprint.
- 8.2 There are likely to be some minor financial implications associated with the draft Wildflower Grass Management report. The Council's grassland management budget is significant and the changes proposed can largely be accommodated within this. There may be additional costs associated with removing cut material, however this should be balanced but the reduced frequency of cuts on these sites. The pilots have demonstrated that, over time, the volume of cut

material decreases as the wildflower percentage increases. Site signage is likely to be expanded, using the brimstone butterfly emblem, to mark sites in conservation management. The machinery required for 'cut and collect' is different to routine grass cutting and its use requires training for the operatives. The current tracked machine has a large capacity and is suitable for cutting wet ground outside the routine grass cutting season. The machine and the initial staff training was largely funded by grant aid from Natural Resources Wales. As the programme develops, there will be a need for additional machinery (in particular for smaller sites) for repairs and eventual replacement and for additional staff training.

9. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 9.1 The work of the Climate Change Steering Group will seek to reduce the impact the Council and its residents and businesses have on the environment and enable the Council to make progress towards achieving the 2030 target.
- 9.2 All reports considered by the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group will take full regard to the seven national wellbeing goals.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The Council's Cabinet has revisited its commitment to becoming a Carbon Neutral Council, and has set an ambitious target of achieving this by 2030, along with the residents and businesses of the County Borough. The Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group has set out an ambitious programme to enable the Council to make progress towards achieving the 2030 target.
- 10.2 On the 28th January 2020, the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group met to consider a report on the draft Wildflower Grass Management Policy for Rhondda Cynon Taf and a report on the action that can be taken in the Air Quality Management Areas, to ensure air quality improves across the County Borough.
- 10.3 The recommendations of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group have been put forward for Cabinet consideration.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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**CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT WILDFLOWER GRASS MANAGEMENT
POLICY FOR RHONDDA CYNON TAF - RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP**

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