

Report To:	CABINET
Date:	29 JANUARY 2024
Heading:	SELECT REVIEW: NO MOW MAY CAMPAIGN
Executive Lead Member:	NOT APPLICABLE
Ward/s:	ALL
Key Decision:	NO
Subject to Call-In:	NO

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present Cabinet with recommendations formulated by the Principal Select Committee following a review of recent No Mow May campaigns the Council has partaken in.

Recommendation(s):

Cabinet is recommended to:

- a) Reaffirm the Council's commitment to partaking in future No Mow May campaigns.
- b) Expand the use of maze cutting and wildflower planting to appropriate green spaces designated as part of future No Mow May campaigns.
- c) Ensure that a communication campaign is rolled out ahead and alongside future No Mow May campaigns to raise public awareness of No Mow May, including the areas taking part as well as the origins and benefits of the campaign.
- d) Commit to ensuring the ongoing maintenance of play parks, sports pitches, and road junctions that could otherwise become dangerous if not maintained, during any future No Mow May campaigns.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

No Mow May was added to the select work programme in June 2023 by the Principal Select Committee. The Principal Select Committee has since carried out a review of the topic and formulated the recommendations above for consideration by Cabinet.

Alternative Options Considered

Members of the Principal Select Committee could have chosen not to submit any recommendations to Cabinet at the conclusion of the Select Review: No Mow May Campaigns. However, having examined all of the information available, Members felt it most appropriate to submit the above recommendations for consideration by Cabinet.

Detailed Information

NO MOW MAY

Origins

No Mow May is a campaign founded in 2019 by Plantlife, calling all garden owners and green space managers not to mow during May. Plantlife is an international conservation charity working to enhance, protect, restore, and celebrate the wild plants and fungi that are essential to all life on earth. Plantlife owns nearly 4,500 acres of nature reserve across England, Scotland, and Wales.

The goal of the campaign is to create a more wildlife-friendly environment by liberating the lawn to host wildflowers and other plants to provide a feast for pollinators, tackle pollution, and lock away carbon in the ground for good.

Why do we need No Mow May?

As described on Plantlife's website, nearly 97% of flower-rich meadows in the UK have been lost since the 1970s and with them have gone vital food needed by pollinators, like bees and butterflies.¹

A healthy lawn with some long grass and wildflowers benefits wildlife, tackles pollution, and can even lock away carbon below ground. With over 20 million gardens in the UK, even the smallest grassy patches add up to a significant portion of our land which can deliver enormous gains for nature, communities, and the climate.

Further explained in a BBC Countryfile article, insects are in worrying decline with butterflies down by around 50% since 1976, and 13 species of bee now extinct.²

COMMITTEE REVIEW

The Principal Select Committee review was led by the Vice Chair, Councillor Julie Gregory, who suggested the topic for inclusion on the select work programme. Councillor Gregory conducted research and met with the Assistant Director of Neighbourhoods to discuss the scale of the Council's involvement with the campaign as well as the challenges the Council faces when partaking. The findings were reported to the Principal Select Committee in September 2023.

No Mow May Areas

As part of the review, Members discussed the areas that had previously been identified and used as part of past No Mow May campaigns.

Members were informed that areas used previously have been:

¹ Plantlife, *No Mow May*, <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/campaigns/nomowmay/>, 2024.

² BBC Countryfile, *No Mow May 2023*, <https://www.countryfile.com/news/no-mow-may-why-you-should-lock-up-your-lawnmower-on-1st-may>, April 2023.

- Areas on the A611
- Areas of Junction 27
- Areas around Teversal Trails
- Areas of Sutton Lawn
- Areas of Titchfield Park

Areas to be included as part of the 2024 No Mow May campaign are currently being identified.

Mowing during May

As part of the review considerations, Members understood that due to various factors the Council may still need to cut certain areas during May despite committing to the No Mow May campaign. As described by Plantlife, these factors can be:³

- Safety First - many road verges are regularly cut to maintain clear lines of visibility and safe pullover zones, particularly crucial at junctions and on tight bends where visibility is low.
- Restorative Management – In some cases, verges that are being restored for wildflowers may need more frequent cutting and removal of cuttings. This gradually leads to naturally lower levels of soil fertility that can support a greater biodiversity. Mowing can be less often and later following this restorative phase of management.
- Contractual Obligation – Local authorities will often use contractors to manage road verges and may be committed to long term contracts which stipulate certain specifications. The maintenance contracts in place may pre-date a local authority's commitment to No Mow May.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following a review of the Council's past efforts to join the No Mow May campaign, Members of the Principal Select Committee formulated four recommendations for the consideration of Cabinet.

- a) Reaffirm the Council's commitment to partaking in future No Mow May Campaigns.

Considering the benefits of the campaign, the Principal Select Committee recommends to Cabinet that the Council's commitment to partaking in the campaign is reaffirmed for future years.

- b) Expand the use of maze cutting and wildflower planting to appropriate green spaces designated as part of future No Mow May campaigns.

Members discussed how participating in No Mow May can be a fun and educational experience for children. By allowing a green space to grow wild for a month, different types of plants and animals can be observed, and children can be involved in identifying different types of plants and insects and learning about the importance of biodiversity and conservation. Members learned that the Council has previously utilised maze cutting on designated green space areas during No Mow May and recommend that this practice is continued in appropriate areas during future campaign months as it creates walk ways for the above activities to take place.

In alignment with the objectives of No Mow May, Members also recommend that the Council expands wildflower planting as part of the campaign in appropriate areas to enhance the benefits gained.

³ Plantlife, *No Mow May*, <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/campaigns/nomowmay/>, 2024.

- c) Ensure that a communication campaign is rolled out ahead and alongside future No Mow May campaigns to raise public awareness of No Mow May, including the areas taking part as well as the origins and benefits of the campaign.

As part of the review Members identified that the Council could improve information sharing efforts with the residents relating to the commitment to No Mow May. This should include details on the Council's website, including listing which areas will be left as part of the campaign and why the Council is taking part. Information could also be included in the Spring edition of Ashfield Matters to raise awareness of the campaign and the benefits for taking part.

The Council could also utilise simple signage in areas not being mowed during the campaign that highlight the campaign efforts. Members were informed that there has previously been plans to do this during past campaign months.

Plantlife, the founder of the No Mow May campaign, provide various different resources to be used to raise awareness of the campaign and objectives. These include logos, printable posters, shareable social media downloads, and downloadable assets for councils. These resources can be accessed on the main Plantlife No Mow May campaign website.

Alongside informing the public of the Council's commitment to No Mow May, the Council could also encourage interested garden owners and green space managers in the District to take part as well by signposting to the guidance published by Plantlife and highlighting the objectives of the campaign.

Members have been advised that a communications plan to support the Council's effort alongside the campaign could be developed and implemented at the start of March 2024. The Council's Communications Team have designed signage that can be used to identify areas being used as part of No Mow May – examples are appended to this report as Appendix A.

- d) Commit to ensuring the ongoing maintenance of play parks, sports pitches, and road junctions that could become dangerous if not maintained, during any future No Mow May campaigns.

It is recognised by the Principal Select Committee that certain green spaces need to be maintained, even during No Mow May, for the reasons listed earlier in this report. Specifically, Committee Members feel it is most important for the Council to focus on the 'safety first' approach described by Plantlife, and ensure that any road verges, junctions, and tight bends that could become dangerous if not maintained throughout May are identified and appropriately managed during the campaign month.

There is also recognition from the Committee that other areas need to be maintained regardless of the No Mow May commitment, these include play parks and sports pitches.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

'Cleaner and Greener' is one of Ashfield District Council's six key priorities outlined within the Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027.

Legal:

There are no significant legal issues identified in the report. [RLD 10/01/2024]

Finance:

Costs to be contained within existing annual environment services budgets. [PH 10/01/2024].

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	Not Applicable
General Fund – Capital Programme	Not Applicable
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	Not Applicable
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	Not Applicable

Risk:

No immediate risks have been identified within this report.

Human Resources:

There are no direct HR implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Environmental/Sustainability:

Environmental and sustainability implications have been of key importance to the Select Review: No Mow May Campaign.

Equalities:

There are no direct equalities implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Other Implications:

There are no other implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Reason(s) for Urgency

None.

Reason(s) for Exemption

None.

Background Papers

None.

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