

CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL
COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES

COMMITTEE:	Community & Environment		
MEETING DATE AND TIME	28th July 2022 7.00pm	LOCATION	Town Hall
REPORT FROM	David McGifford, Chief Officer		
AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE	15 “No Mow May” – Lessons to learn for 2023		
Background	<p>In 2022 Congleton Town Council and the Streetscape Team embraced the “No Mow May” campaign. Cheshire East Council (CEC), who contract Congleton Town Council (CTC) to carry out the work, also embraced the campaign.</p> <p>For the month of May, the Streetscape Team only cut grass in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • play areas– either official or well used-unofficial play areas. • formal areas such as the cenotaph and community garden. • in areas where not to cut would have caused health and safety issues. <p>This was part of a national campaign to give wildlife a greater chance by allowing spring flowers, food for insects and bees, to flourish to help combat the nature emergency. This is followed with less frequent cuts throughout the year.</p> <p>This paper has been written to inform members of some of the issues created by “No Mow May” and to seek guidance on how the Town Council should proceed in 2023.</p>		
Further information	<p>Along with any new scheme the team faced several issues, which we need to look at for next year.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Streetscape Manager, CTC office staff and Cheshire East Council received a number of email and telephone complaints from local people about long grass and accusing the Councils of cost-cutting. Next year there needs to be more publicity and education around why “No Mow May” is important and how it doesn’t actually save any money, but it’s about saving nature. 2. There was an expectation from many people that within the first couple of days in June all of the long grass would be cut across the town. The Town Council Streetscape Team is responsible for 179,016 sq m of public amenity open space and 120,732 sq m of playing fields. It takes around three weeks with the equipment and staff that CTC has to complete all of the areas. With the grass being extra-long, extra thick and lush, it is more problematic to cut. It’s harder on the machines and contains more wildlife, which is removed where possible, and it also creates more of a mess as the mowers do not collect up the cuttings. In many cases two cuts were needed as the grass was too long to go straight to mowing. 		

Again, expectations need to be managed.

3. CTC's commitment to the Nature Emergency does not stop with "No Mow May". Where the Streetscape Team has seen fit and feasible, they have left some swathes of long grass (see image below) this is then left all year round, making a balance of being able to play safely in short grass as well as watching and playing near local wildlife in the longer grass.



4. Congleton Town Council remains committed to making our grounds maintenance practices more sustainable and more wildlife friendly. We have identified areas where we will let the grass grow longer, trial new planting such as meadow creation and perennial planting, let hedges grow thicker, plant more trees, and let some areas naturally regenerate. We will be composting more and leaving deadwood in areas where it is appropriate to create habitat piles. We are also trialling some electrical equipment instead of petrol-fuelled equipment.

The changes we are making support Cheshire East Council's Environment Strategy to address and adapt to climate change and aid nature recovery and also support the declaration that Congleton Town Council signed up to in November 2019 declaring a climate emergency. We aim to reduce waste, reduce our carbon footprint, and improve habitats for wildlife.

We understand that in some places this is quite a change, however we are ensuring that there is still plenty of space for everybody to continue to have fun, exercise, relax and enjoy all the benefits of our open spaces.

For 2023, it would help to raise public awareness of the thought process behind "No Mow May" and highlight the time taken to catch back up with the consequences of not cutting in May, and hopefully people can be more accepting. It may be that in some areas it would help to cut less frequently rather than leaving it for the full month.

Financial Considerations	<p>“No Mow May” is not a money-saving exercise as the staff that would be cutting grass are switched to other grounds duties. It does create issues in June with the need for increased hours and spare parts for the mowers to cope with the thick, long grass.</p> <p>Had May not been a good month, where hanging baskets and troughs were ready to go out, this could have had consequences in early June.</p>
Environmental Considerations	<p>“No Mow May” is about addressing the nature emergency.</p>
Equality and Inclusivity considerations	<p>This policy is applied across the town without prejudice.</p>
Proposal	<p>To continue to support “No Mow May” in 2023, but to increase the publicity and public education around the project to reduce the amount of time spent dealing with complaints.</p>