

# Evidence, Engagement and Consultation Summary

Ref no. P4 Introduce more rewilding

## Description of proposal

Title for consultation: Introduce more rewilding

We aim to keep our borough clean, safe and pleasant for our residents and visitors. We are responsible for maintaining council-owned parks and open spaces, grassed areas, trees, play areas and horticultural features. This involves cutting back hedges and shrubs and also grass cutting.

At many sites across the borough we already allow the grass to grow longer. These areas receive one cut per year. Areas that are most used by the public, such as play areas, visibility splays (on highways), paths and edges are cut more often. Reducing the amount of grass cutting is helping us to meet the Government's biodiversity targets. Longer grass supports birds who feed on seeds and encourage wildflowers to flourish which will attract pollinating insects such as bees. By increasing the amount of longer grass we are able to improve habitats for wildlife and can make savings.

## Estimated Net Saving / new income 2025/26

£50,000

## Summary of evidence, engagement and consultation

99 people commented on this proposal. The proposal is supported but not without concerns:

- 51% fully support
- 28% support but with concerns / amendments
- 20% do not support
- 1% don't know.

Comments in relation to how the proposal might affect them included:

The comments reflect a mix of positive and negative sentiments towards introducing more rewilding.

On the positive side, many people appreciate the increase in biodiversity and the benefits to wildlife, such as insects and birds. Some also mention the environmental benefits, such as reducing air and noise pollution (from machinery) and improving the overall environment.

*"For parks and greenspaces the rewilding initiative has been very effective to increase the biodiversity in these areas. By not cutting the verges it has also encouraged insects and other wildlife which is desperately needed for birds etc."*

*"Increases in biodiversity brings nature back into our urban areas."*

*"It will help to reduce our carbon footprint from Walsall Council and the borough as well as improve habitats for wildlife, enable species pollination and lead to the regeneration of nature."*

*"I live close to the Arboretum, good to see wildlife thrive."*

There are suggestions to use green spaces for growing food and to involve communities in maintaining these areas.

*“Could some green spaces be used to grow food which requires less care or communities offered chance to adopt an area?”*

However, there are also several concerns. Some people feel that rewilding makes the area look untidy and unkempt, leading to a negative perception of the borough and a lack of pride.

*“Rewilding makes Walsall look tired.”*

*“I’m all for rewilding. However, letting the weeds and rubbish accumulate in gutters/roads is very unsightly. Keep it tidy and clean looking.”*

*“The borough of Walsall looks unkempt, dirty, and uncared for. I have lived here for most of my 68 years and the town and surrounding areas are a disgrace. This policy is about saving money from not cutting grass and getting rid of weeds. People should be encouraged to care about where they live and this should be led by the council.”*

*“Rewilding is another name for a mess. Many people are complaining that the grass is not cut - cutting the grass keeps areas tidy and there is more evidence that in well-kept areas that anti-social behaviour is less because people have pride in their area.”*

*“Increase in litter and mess will become an issue in overgrown areas, impacting nature. Therefore, saving should not be in place, but increase litter picking and removal. PRIDE is part of the council, demonstrate it!”*

*“Cut the grass and collect it. Stop making it look a mess.”*

There are worries about safety, particularly around road signs and traffic islands, and the potential for increased anti-social behaviour in overgrown areas.

*“This may affect me if too many areas are left un-cut and we should still encourage to cut areas around road signs and other safety critical infrastructure.”*

*“Please focus on rewilding areas in solely SAFE places.”*

Some feel that rewilding has prevented children from accessing playgrounds and playing in open green space.

*“Over the summer the children of Park Hall have lost the right to use their local parks due to the re-wilding scheme. I have complained to the council along with many others over the summer as to why our parks (Newquay Park and Treyamon Park) have been chosen for re-wilding as it clearly states PARKS should not be considered for re-wilding!”*

*“All local amenity spaces, including two children's parks were left uncut this year-the first time in 54 years. Children had nowhere to play and residents were appalled with the look of the area. Walsall Council managed to drag Park Hall down to the level of abandoned green spaces riddled with weeds and ragwort. This was not 're-wilding' it was just not cutting.”*

Overall, while there is support for the environmental benefits of rewilding, there are significant concerns about its implementation and impact on the community's appearance and safety.

### **Alternative suggestions**

- Rewilding and grass management: Replace grass with creeping thyme or clover to reduce mowing needs and encourage bees. Encourage community groups to help with park

maintenance and litter picking. Involve schools and community groups in rewilding efforts and maintaining green spaces.

- Cost-Saving measures and income generation: Cut grants and funding to support groups. Fine motorists for parking on grassed areas and pavements. Implement efficiency savings like turning down thermostats in council premises. Reduce councillors' wages and stop free buffets. Sell off empty buildings and factory sites to generate money. Implement a charge/fine system for businesses that do not keep areas around their premises clean. Implement a minimal car parking charge at Walsall Arboretum to generate revenue.
- Community Involvement: Encourage residents to maintain verges and grassland in front of their properties for a council tax discount. Use community service for criminals to maintain parks and green spaces. Organise community volunteer programs to maintain rewilded areas.
- Other suggestions: Provide more litter bins in parks and public spaces to reduce litter. Reduce the number of unnecessary statues and reallocate funds to more needed areas. Encourage productivity and efficiency in council departments.

### **Overall opinion from engagement and consultation**

Respondents support this proposal but with concerns / amendments.

### **Justifiable action from the evidence, engagement and consultation suggested in the Equality Impact Assessment**

A – No major change required

### **Mitigating actions required, if proposal approved**

NA

### **People potentially negatively affected, if proposal approved**

NA

### **Response from Walsall Council on Proposal Ref P4**

Following consideration of consultation feedback and equality impact assessment, Cabinet does not intend to implement the proposal.