

Extraordinary Meeting 29th June 2020

Item 11 b) Sustainable Swanage - Update

Since 1st April 2020 Swanage Town Council has funded a Sustainable Swanage Officer, Sarah Spurling, on a two-day per week basis. This post is managed by 'Litter Free Coast and Sea', which in turn is hosted by Dorset Council.

A key part of the role is to engage with the community to promote and encourage a more sustainable Swanage. Clearly the period of lockdown has made this difficult. However, Sarah has focused on developing a range of projects which will hopefully start to see fruition later in the year.

The following appendices are provided below:

1. Sustainable Swanage Update
2. Rabling Road/Prospect Crescent Green Space
3. The Downs Nature Reserve

Councillors are asked to review the attached appendices and to consider the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. That the Sustainable Swanage update is noted.
2. That the proposal for 'The Downs Nature Reserve' is approved and the four-step process be initiated by Sustainable Swanage. This will include the development of a Management Plan by Council Officers with the support of Sustainable Swanage.
3. That the Council approves in principle the development of a 'pocket park' at the Rabling Road/Prospect Crescent site and requests that Sustainable Swanage work up a detailed proposal outlining a design, costs and programme of community engagement.
4. That Council identifies any further sites for pocket parks and community orchards that may be worthy of consideration.

Culvin Milmer
Visitor Services Manager

June 2020

Appendix 1

Sustainable Swanage Project Update 10th June 2020 – Sarah Spurling, Sustainable Swanage Officer

Although it was not the start to the new role that we envisaged we are beginning to feel like we are making progress on new projects and are continuing our engagement with the community. Detailed below is the progress we have made in recent months.

Sustainable Swanage is split into a series of sub-groups as follows:

1. Communications
2. Greening Swanage
3. Purbeck Energy Group
4. Transport
5. Sustainable Swanage Youth and Schools
6. Business engagement and Plastic Free Swanage

1. Communications

The current situation has meant we have held back on much of our planned communications but as things slowly return to a ‘new normal’ we will develop this further.

Social media – We spent some time in April and May developing positive original content on the themes of local produce, improving biodiversity in our gardens, and sharing the new things people have learnt/enjoyed during lockdown. We have had good engagement, and built connections with local producers, organisations. The content gathered is going to be collated and made available on the website and potentially in our new eco-hub. As of the end of June we have over 400 followers on the Facebook page.

Website – in the last 2 months a suite of 12 new webpages have been developed as a resource for the community, hosted by our LFCS website, they are divided into:

- How to live sustainably locally
- Projects and getting involved
- News and Events

<https://www.litterfreecoastandsea.co.uk/sustainable-swanage/>

This has now been shared, and we will be promoting it more widely. The idea is to continually develop and update the pages throughout the project. I have been undergoing training in how to edit and add the content myself to reduce costs.

Open meetings – we have held two open meetings using Zoom during lockdown. The most recent being focussed on food and farming with Claire and Andrew Head from Cedar Organic as guest speakers. It was well attended by 25 people and we had a good discussion. We got good feedback from the participants and are looking to hold the next one on the theme of sustainable transport in mid-July.

Other - Thelma Deacon is reading out updates from us on her radio show and we will be inputting an article into ‘Swanage Matters’. I am involved in the newly formed Purbeck

Engagement and Access Forum which is a great new network, co-ordinated by Tom Clarke NT, of local environmental groups and outdoor education settings.

Volunteers - there is a need to formalise volunteer involvement and provide guidelines and information as our group expanded. This will help with clarity on roles and responsibilities, maintaining consistency in our approach and ensuring everyone has the support they need and is covered by our insurance. We have created a new sign-up form for volunteers and are in the final stages of the volunteer handbook. These will be given to all the volunteers in due course.

We currently have 13 active volunteers who are working on projects.

2. Greening Swanage

We are pleased to report that through working with local schools, a church, a farmer, Dorset Council, the National Trust, the Trees for Dorset charity, and residents through our tree giveaway, over 1,600 new trees were planted around Swanage this year. The volunteer team have been busy ensuring the newly planted trees are watered and cared for in this crucial first year. Several sites and private gardens have also been making improvements to allow more life on their lawns, most notably Swanage School and All Saints church through our involvement with them. We are looking into other projects now for this year including DC sites, Aster Housing land, churches, and schools as well as STC sites.

3. Purbeck Energy Group

This group which is co-ordinated by members of our steering group but includes members from other parishes, is making good progress on developing initiatives that can help residents access renewable energy sources. Two of these are an Energy Local Club and obtaining group discounts for solar panels on residential properties. Dorset Community Energy has agreed to assist Sustainable Swanage with a grant application of £10,000 for start-up costs for Swanage Energy Local Club.

4. Transport

We have begun looking at possibilities to help reduce cars on the road. It is in people's minds currently as we have seen the benefits of reduced car use and the new funding was announced that got people talking. I have had a look at the DC feasibility study into infrastructure change which obviously involves considerable investment which might not be possible at the moment. However, there are other opportunities to explore and it would be good to create a vision for the future.

Other options for change at the moment are incentives and campaigns to encourage people to walk and cycle more. A suggestion from a resident on our recent Facebook post was to run a 'Get Swanage walking campaign' this could be linked to the Medical Practice and the Durlston Pleasure Grounds project. The Rangers are also keen to discuss an electric bike hire scheme. I propose that the next open meeting is about transport and we aim to set up a sub-group who can focus on developing these initiatives.

5. Sustainable Swanage Youth and Schools

The youth group have not been active since lockdown restrictions, but will look into getting this up and running again soon. Earlier in the year I was helping GCSE DT students at the

Swanage School with their sustainability themed design projects. I offered feedback and connected them with experts on specific topics. We were due to have a presentation of completed designs until the schools closed. It would be good to work with schools more and I am currently exploring options to help schools connect pupils with their local environment via home learning at this time.

6. Business Engagement and Plastic Free Swanage

No further work undertaken in this area during lockdown.

Other Project ideas

Audio Guide Trail May 2020

Aim:

- to increase awareness about Sustainable Swanage – build our audience – engage with new people
- to increase understanding and appreciation of the local area and the issues it faces
- to work with other local groups and experts – building relationships

To co-ordinate an audio self-guided walk around Swanage highlighting the main features, wildlife, geology, history whilst touching upon the environmental pressures facing the area and how people can help take care of it and understand it. To make our community more sustainable.

Durlston Rangers are doing a downloadable audio guided walk from pier to park using 'sound cloud' This is a relatively simple process and free. We are proposing that we link our walks, same technology and same format. SusSwan would co-ordinate different speakers to record up to 2min of recording covering the topics related to them.

Community Fridge

A good way of getting surplus veg from allotments and Greengage to the public who need it – links – Greengage, Food bank.

There are good examples of where this has been done in other towns such as Frome and Wimborne and resources and possible funding are available from the environmental charity Hubbub.

Ecological Surveys

It would be good to organise some baseline surveys of flora and fauna at sites in the town before any more biodiversity improvements are made. We can connect with local conservation organisations who have volunteers on their register who may be interested in carrying this out this summer. I have got all the records that Dorset Environment Records Centre hold for the town and they mentioned that they are keen to look at ecological network mapping more closely in the town of Swanage too, I am getting more information on this.

Baseline carbon footprint calculator

It might be useful as a baseline to encourage people to calculate their carbon footprint now and after any new measures they might put in place. Resurgence have a very comprehensive

calculator recommended by Sustainable Dorset. This could tie in with their Dorset Green Living project.

The Downs Local Nature Reserve

A detailed proposal for this can be found in Appendix 2.

Rabling Road/Prospect Crescent Green Space

A detailed proposal for this can be found in Appendix 3.

Appendix 2

Proposal – Declaration of Peveril Downs as a Local Nature Reserve.

This site is an ideal candidate for an LNR as it is in local authority ownership and management. It is also an accessible green space close to the town, it has local special interest and educational and community value. It is included in the Swanage Green Infrastructure Strategy which has previously been adopted by Swanage Town Council.

Benefits

Declaring an LNR on the Downs offers the following benefits:

- Protects and enhances natural heritage.
- The management plan required is an opportunity to look closely at how the site can be managed and enhanced to meet various needs. It would provide a clear guide to the operations department and be a written account of how the site is being balanced for access, recreation, and nature.
- Protecting and enhancing natural heritage is a key part of building sustainable communities.
- It can help connect green spaces.
- Declaring an LNR draws attention to the land's nature conservation and recreation interest and provides a place that can inspire people to value and conserve the natural environment.
- Improve local quality of life, health, and wellbeing.
- Creates new spaces/focus for education, enjoyment, and recreation, helps attract visitors and preserves links with the local community's past.
- The setting up of a 'friends of' group is a way of involving the community in the management of the site and assisting the council with its management providing expertise and time.
- These multiple benefits mean that LNRs can make a substantial contribution to meeting the aspirations of Local Strategic Partnerships.

Natural England believes that well managed LNRs provide places that can inspire people to value and conserve the natural environment. The natural environment is there for everyone to enjoy, learn and gain benefits from, particularly for their health and wellbeing. Communities should be able to play a leading role in helping to conserve the natural environment particularly on their doorstep.

Process

There are 4 main steps that could feasibly be completed by the end of the year.

- Transfer the power to declare from DC to STC – this would need to be done first as the process takes a while.
- Write a management plan
- Form a 'friends of group'
- Gain approval from Natural England

These steps could be achieved using the skills and experience of the Sustainable Swanage project officer and volunteers with support and advice from the Environment Advice Team at DC and the Durlston Ranger team. We could also make valuable links between both Durlston and the Downs and with their volunteers and 'friends' group.

Appendix 3

Proposal – Green Space between Rabling Road / Prospect Crescent, Swanage

This site is listed under the Green Infrastructure Strategy as a potential 'pocket park (wildflower meadow with tree and shrub planting)'. It is currently listed as having 'low' value for wildlife and 'low' GI value and it would be better for the environment and people if this site is managed in an alternative way. It could then be part of a network of pocket parks throughout the town, providing welcome places to relax, find shade/sun, meet people, and feel connected to the community. This site would provide a corridor link between King George's field into the allotments and wider countryside beyond.

Improvements to the current use in this way would bring the benefits of 'decreasing air pollution and heat island effect, increase biodiversity, amenity and landscape permeability'. Currently this site is underused and is maintained as a large area of short grass. People frequently cross the site along the top section for dog walking and to access the allotments and people occasionally use the area to play games with children.

Proposal

This is an ideal site to be included in a network of community orchards. It is informal and the trees are medium sized and suitable for the urban location. The proposal will also include a combination of mown areas, wildflower meadows and tree planting. At least one area of open space will be retained to allow small scale events, recreation and maintain existing access routes.

The aim of a community orchard is to increase access to healthy fresh fruit, provide a teaching tool for schools and the community, an opportunity for groups and schools to link together and work together. Satisfies biodiversity and greening aims as part of the Green Infrastructure Strategy. Increase attractiveness of the area and provide a favourable area for people to sit and relax and meet away from the main parks and beaches.

Interest and Support

Several of the Greening Swanage Group are keen to organise this, we have a good relationship with Greengage Nursey, and they are very keen on this project and can offer time and skills for aftercare of the trees. This could mutually benefit our groups as we support each other in expanding our reach to the community.

There is a wealth of information on setting up an orchard and pocket park and it is a very popular step for groups like ours. There are orchards in Worth, Langton, Lyme Regis and Bridport to name a few. The newly formed Green Infrastructure Advice Team at DC can offer expert support and advice in planning the location of planting and the Durlston Ranger Team too can offer advice on meadow creation. We will also look to connect with local specialist growers.

We would need to raise money to fund the purchase of the trees and equipment needed, the Greening Swanage subgroup would look into these options.

Benefits of this site

- It is ideally located next to Greengage and the allotments for people to maintain the site.
- It provides a corridor link between King George's field into the allotments and wider countryside beyond.
- There is easy access for all and parking spaces nearby.
- It is in a central open location and a water source is available.
- It is currently underused, and some residents have expressed a desire to see this site developed into a resource for the community to enjoy and use.
- It is a good location for small scale relevant events such as seed/seedling/produce swap, and displays, harvest events and apple days, and wassail.

The Town Council are asked to consider other locations that may be suitable for development as pocket parks and community orchards.

Suggested Design

We propose that the site should be designed in an informal open plan with perhaps two clusters of fruit trees leaving areas of open space and access routes. Wildflower areas could be maintained that balance the amenity of the site with wildlife. The design should allow for ease of cutting and maintaining the grass which we understand would continue to be carried out by STC.

Taking this forward

If the development of a pocket park is approved in principle by Swanage Town Council, Sustainable Swanage will work up detailed plans around design, costs and community engagement.