

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO 2019-2021

This report is a brief run through some of the highlights of two years' work in the areas of waste & recycling, street cleansing, and parks & green spaces since the start of the Alliance administration in 2019.

WASTE & RECYCLING

Priority: moving towards zero residual waste to landfill and incineration

- Unlike many local authorities, the City Council maintained uninterrupted waste and recycling collections throughout the pandemic despite increased tonnages (residual up 4%, recycling up 30%, green waste up 52%). This is testament both to the dedication of our staff in serving the district, and to the highly successful emergency planning that kept essential services running.
- A strong working relationship with the County Council waste section led to the City Council being selected to carry out a trial reintroduction of food waste collections in Heysham, in anticipation of central government plans to make them mandatory. This is being supported by £25K funding from the County Council. The project was delayed (twice) by the pandemic, but is now due to launch in May 2021.
- A micro-scale trial of replacing recycling boxes with recycling wheelie bins was completed. Proposals to phase this in across the district will be worked up in due course when waste funding situation is clearer. In the meantime a larger scale trial is being considered.
- Green waste charges frozen for third year with subscriptions now at highest ever level. New software system will allow direct debit payments and automatic renewals.
- Route optimisation software purchased in 2020, with work undertaken and ready for roll out in July 2021. Expected to save 15% fuel consumption across the waste fleet (£50K).
- Additional textile recycling bring sites have been added leading to an increase in volumes collected.
- Plans have been developed to add small electrical and batteries to kerbside collections - due to be implemented Summer 2021.
- Worked with Freegle to encourage reuse/free exchange of unwanted items by promoting the Freegle app in Your District Council Matters. Subsequent agreement to sponsor the cost of running the two groups in the district, which the County Council copied a few months later, covering the whole County.

STREET CLEANSING

Priority: keeping our district's neighbourhoods, parks, beaches and open space clean, well maintained, and safe

- A trial of litter bin sensors has been carried out in an urban area, allowing responsive rather than cyclical emptying of bins. System works well and improves quality of service but cost savings less clear. Now trialling in Silverdale as savings may be greater in rural areas where travel time is more of a factor.
- Successfully applied for £25K of WRAP funding to tackle litter issues in rural areas.
- Some well-used litter bins have been replaced with jumbo-sized bins that contain a wheelie bin inside the enclosure. These have more than double the capacity of a standard bin, are easier and safer for the crews to empty and don't require plastic liners.
- Rotting metal recycling bins in Lancaster city centre have been replaced with jumbo bins similar to above, and are being trialled in new areas including Dalton Sq and Market Sq. There have been issues in the past with high levels of contamination in recycling bins in prominent locations, but it is hoped that the greater public awareness around plastic waste will lead to better yields.
- 674 volunteer community litter picks supported between July and December 2020.

- 3151 incidences of fly-tipping dealt with in the last year, up 122% over the preceding 12 months. Much of this is dumping of furniture and electrical items in back alleys. Teams are working on joined-up approaches to tackling this problem, which will be trialled in Harbour Ward. Also carried out some successful intensive clean-up/amnesty events on selected estates in conjunction with Council Housing.
- Responsibility for weed removal on highways and footways was transferred back to the County Council in April 2020. Herbicide spraying had become increasingly unpopular with staff given recent well publicised health concerns, and also increasingly ineffective as weeds build up resistance. Alternative methods were investigated but while effective are slower, and level of funding in public realm contract with County was inadequate.

PARKS & GREEN SPACES

Priorities: increasing the biodiversity of our district; working in partnership with residents, local organisations and partners, recognising the strengths and skills in our community

- After a long gestation, the Grasslands Management Strategy has now reached the implementation stage. This should bring significant biodiversity benefits, but has also enabled a restructure of staff into area based teams, and replacement of seasonal posts with new full time positions, increasing operational capacity.
- City Council is no longer using glyphosate herbicide on its own land except to treat non-native invasive species controlled by law.
- Making Spaces community green space grant funding applications all in and assessed early 2020, but delivery put on hold due to the pandemic. Projects expected to start implementation Summer 2021.
- Thousands of trees planted on City Council land in the winter 19/20 planting season with Woodland Trust funding. Tree Council funding for planting on St Chad's Drive. Working with Parish Councils, River Trusts to help identify sites outside of Council ownership.
- £110K investment at Happy Mount Park to improve footpaths. A further £60K is allocated for replacing the Splash Park surfacing, and new play provision is being added.
- Opportunity has been taken for further investment in the zoo at Williamson Park during the enforced closure due to lockdown, and initial scoping work for replacement of the cafe building has commenced.
- Working with community and friends groups, improvements have been undertaken at Poulton Park, Ryelands Park, Barley Cop Woods, Miss Whalley's Field, Far Moor, and Halton FC.
- White Lund Deport nursery is now hosting a growing site for the FoodFutures FarmStart project, training a next generation of market gardeners, and also the Hermitage Field Community Meadow project, which is helping the City Council grow wildflower plug plants to support the Grasslands Management Strategy.

Huge thanks to Will Griffith and his teams for their commitment to addressing the Climate Emergency and enthusiasm for making the district a better place for all of us.

Dave Brookes
Cabinet Member for Natural Environment