

Question 1.

On behalf of the 7,000-or-so residents who signed a petition started by Jack Jordan, I am asking the Scrutiny Committee to review the policy of verge-cutting in the County. Jack also emailed a question to the Committee, and the following includes his thoughts and views as he was unable to attend today's meeting.

Bucks residents were horrified to see that wildflowers and grasses on verges had been mown down in mid-summer while they were still in flower, still feeding insects, bees and birds, and not yet having set seed for next year.

By limiting and timing verge-cutting, Bucks can save money, increase biodiversity, live up to its climate change duties, and score valuable Brownie points with the voting and tax-paying public.

In the financial year 2019/20, £883,075 was spent by the five former councils of Buckinghamshire on roadside verge grass cutting - plenty of scope for meaningful savings.

And just last month, Bucks was selected by DEFRA as one of the pilot local authorities for the Nature Recovery Network and the creation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies. Roadside verges form a key element in biodiversity recovery, so to destroy them with unnecessary verge-cutting runs contrary to the spirit and objectives of the LNRS initiative.

Of course, some small areas of verge must be cut back for safety reasons, e.g. to ensure sight-lines on bends and at junctions, but there is no good economic, environmental or social reason why huge swathes of our 'linear nature reserves' should be destroyed. In other words, the current policy runs counter to the basic principles of sustainability.

How can the Scrutiny Committee help to ensure a sustainable policy from now on, to ensure that we, and the birds and insects, can enjoy more wildflowers for longer in 2021 and beyond.

Question 2.

Following the passing of the Climate Change motion at the Council's first full meeting in July, the Council must now move forward in delivering a robust strategy and action plan on how it will achieve net zero by 2050.

With regard to that strategy and action plan, can the Committee confirm whether the Council intends to consult with (a) external experts in this field and (b) local environmental groups in Bucks, many of whom are doing tireless and valuable work in an effort to make Buckinghamshire greener and reduce its carbon footprint."

Question 3.

Given the reduced capacity of public buses due to Covid restrictions, what is the council's plan for a suitable integrated car-free school bus - cycling- walking transport solution that provides affordable, clean transport for all children in the county to get to school?