Consultation on Proposed Improvements to Alexandra Gardens, West Chesterton. Supplementary Information.

Introduction

This is a Cambridge City Council Environmental Improvement Programme (EIP) funded project for biodiversity improvements to Alexandra Gardens. This is an established green space for play, leisure, socialising, and nature in West Chesterton. It has an area of approximately 1.2 hectares.

The improvements aim to enhance the value of the green space for people and biodiversity; to provide interest and learning opportunities for users; and to protect and enhance habitat for wildlife.

The purpose of consultation is to encourage local communities to get involved, through feeding back your views and asking questions about the proposed improvements. Your voices will help the city council to gauge local interest, respond to your feedback, and to help shape the proposal further. We welcome your opinions and suggestions: they will help us to understand the level of local support and identify any necessary alterations to the proposal.

The improvements have been considered in the context of the whole park and the existing amenity it offers to residents and visitors. So, at present, they focus mainly on the fringes, outside the mown area, to avoid encroaching on valuable amenity space and opportunity for play.

As the proposed planting and other habitat features settle into their environment, they are expected to provide a rich and diverse habitat improvement for local wildlife, encouraging a variety of species and so raising the value of the green space and surrounding area for people and biodiversity.

The proposed enhancements include:

- Bee mound and wildflower meadow
- Wildflower meadow strips
- Deadwood (log pile) habitat
- Bug hotel
- Bee post and wildflower meadow
- Nest boxes
- Information posts and nature trail

The Proposal

The image below illustrates the proposed locations for a bee slope (green dot), wildflower meadow strips (yellow dots), a log pile (red dot), bug hotel (purple dot), and bee post (blue dot), as described below.

Bee Mound and Wildflower Meadow

This area offers a rare opportunity in Cambridge: a south-facing slope, perfect for establishing a wildflower meadow with a dedicated bee mound.

The proposal is to scrape back a layer of grass and create a bee mound for mining bees using a mix of low-nutrient sandy soil and crushed ceramic. Around this, we would establish a loop of wildflower turf and mixed native bulbs, forming a vibrant wildflower meadow.

Together, these features will create an important variety of habitats, encourage solitary bees and other vital pollinators, while also provide food, shelter, and cover for birds, butterflies, and insects. The meadow will bring seasonal bursts of colour and fragrance, adding interest and biodiversity for visitors to enjoy throughout the year.

Wildflower Meadow Strips

We propose creating wildflower meadow strips to increase biodiversity and seasonal interest in the park.

Bowling Green Hedge Line (south-west side): Replace an existing grass strip (approx. 20m x 1m) with wildflower turf and mixed native bulbs. This sunny position, just outside the tree canopy, provides excellent conditions to support local wildlife.

Playpark Boundary (east side): Establish a second meadow strip, also planted with bulbs, along two edges of the fence line.

Together, these meadow strips will provide food, shelter, and cover for birds, bees, and butterflies, while offering visitors a colourful, fragrant display that changes with the seasons.

Deadwood (log pile) Habitat

On the southern side of the park, we propose creating a deadwood log pile using locally felled timber. As the wood decays, it will form an important micro-habitat, providing food and nurseries for insects, supporting fungi, and returning nutrients to the soil.

Soil pockets between the logs will be planted with ferns and other woodland species, while shade-tolerant bulbs could be added around the base. Together, these features will enhance biodiversity, support pollinators, and add visual interest to this part of the park.

Bug Hotel

We propose attaching a timber bug hotel to the southern boundary fence of the children's play park. Bug hotels bring a range of benefits to both wildlife and people. They provide nesting sites for solitary bees and other pollinators, support a variety of other insect species, and help link urban green spaces by creating wildlife corridors.

They also offer educational value, engaging children and adults in learning about the insect lifecycle and the importance of pollinators to our environment.

Bee Post

We propose installing a bee post on the northern boundary of the park. A bee post is a vertically installed timber post with holes drilled into it, providing nesting and shelter opportunities for solitary bees.

This bright, open spot is also well-suited for a wildflower meadow with mixed native bulbs planted beneath. The combination will create both a valuable habitat for pollinators and a colourful, seasonal point of interest for visitors.

Nest Boxes

We propose to install a range of bat roost boxes and bird nest boxes in mature trees.

Information Posts and Nature Trail

We propose installing small timber information posts with interactive features. Each post would support a sign containing information about the planned habitat improvements and notes on local plant and animal species.

To add an engaging element, signs could include QR codes linking to more detailed online resources, and engraved insect shapes for visitors to make rubbings.

The proposed new habitat features are located next to the main path that loops around the park. Posts would be positioned at each feature, forming a nature trail that encourages visitors to explore, learn, and collect rubbings from all the posts.

Together, improvements like these enhance the natural environment, support local wildlife, and create opportunities for greater understanding and appreciation of biodiversity. They bring people and nature closer while promoting a sustainable, ecologically balanced landscape.