

REPORT TO:	HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES	AGENDA ITEM: 11
DATE OF MEETING:	30th JANUARY 2019	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	ALLISON THOMAS STRATEGIC DIRECTOR SERVICE DELIVERY	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	MARY BAGLEY HEAD OF CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICES T: 01283 595910	DOC:
SUBJECT:	"SWAD IN BLOOM"	
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	SWADLINCOTE AND MIDWAY WARDS	TERMS OF REFERENCE: (See Notes)

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Council join in with and support the national Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) "In Bloom" Scheme.
- 1.2 That the Council support the "Swad in Bloom" Group (SIBG) and its Action Plan.
- 1.3 That the Council approve permission for the SIBG to maintain and improve, in partnership with the Council, the areas of Council land, as delineated on the plans Appendix 1 and 2.
- 1.4 That the Council provide advice, help and support to the formative SIBG on volunteering protocols, insurance, risk assessment, proposed projects etc.
- 1.5 That the Council support the SIBG in any application for permissions, grant-aid and funding which affects Council land or impacts on the visual amenity of the town.

2.0 Purpose of the Report

- 2.1 To make the Council aware of a request to support the newly formed "Swad in Bloom" group and to support their ambition to join the national "In Bloom" scheme. The Corporate Plan states that the Council wants to-
 - Enhance the attractiveness of South Derbyshire*
 - i. *Enhance the appeal of Swadlincote town centre as a place to visit*
 - ii. *Improve public spaces to create an environment for people to enjoy*
 - Engage with communities*
 - iii. *Support and celebrate volunteering, community groups and the voluntary sector*

This provides an opportunity for the Council to prove its credentials and commitment to its Values and Aims as enshrined in the Corporate Plan.

3.0 Executive Summary

The Royal Horticultural Society's "In Bloom" scheme was established to encourage communities across the UK to brighten up neighbourhoods and help regenerate areas by improving the local environment, tackling local issues and building a sense of community.

The "Swad in Bloom" group formed in May 2019 with strong support from Swadlincote residents. The group is not far from being fully constituted as a community group and intend eventually to register for charitable status. Their meetings are often attended by local Councillors.

They propose a number of projects including

- Keeping the town centre plantings well-maintained
- Improving a number of town centre sites with owner permission
- Swadlincote clean-up events
- Marketing and Promotion
- Fundraising

They wish to identify any Council-owned sites that might be available for them to "adopt" and improve.

When they are fully constituted it is likely that they will apply for full support from the Council for their work. At this stage they are not considering entering any competition next year in order to allow the group to consolidate.

The Corporate Plan states that the Council intends to-

Enhance the attractiveness of South Derbyshire

iv. Enhance the appeal of Swadlincote town centre as a place to visit

v. Improve public spaces to create an environment for people to enjoy

Engage with communities

vi. Support and celebrate volunteering, community groups and the voluntary sector

Support, as outlined in the report recommendations, provides an opportunity for the Council to prove its credentials and commitment to its Values and Aims as enshrined in the Corporate Plan.

4.0 Detail

- 4.1 The Royal Horticultural Society's In Bloom scheme was established to encourage communities across the UK to brighten up neighbourhoods and help regenerate areas by improving the local environment, tackling local issues and building a sense of community. The scheme is divided into regional areas (Swadlincote is in the East Midlands area) and there are two forms of entry, as a competition against similar-sized towns, or non-competitively as a community seeking to improve its awarded grade. Entrants are judged on the three main criteria as outlined below, all of which correspond well with the Council's Corporate Plan. Entrants who win their regional category are selected to enter "*Britain in Bloom*"

- 4.2 **Horticultural Achievement** - imaginative planting of trees, flowers, shrubs and bulbs, wildlife gardens, food growing and awareness-raising, orchards, pocket parks, wildflower areas, flowering containers and baskets.

- 4.3 **Environmental Responsibility** - projects which tackle issues related to the waste hierarchy, composting and recycling; tackling litter, graffiti, vandalism and antisocial behaviour - to encourage long-term neighbourhood improvements.
- 4.4 **Community Participation** - In Bloom projects help to increase the skills, experience, capability and capacity of the people involved, fostering a 'can do' attitude to local environmental improvements, transforming wasteland, enhancing local ownership, participation and determination. It includes partnership-working with community groups, businesses, commercial and industrial involvement, uniformed organisations, residents' associations, disability and minority groups etc.
- 4.5 The In Bloom scheme is about much more than just flowers - the whole community works together to improve their local pride, and make their neighbourhoods a better place to live. East Midlands in Bloom cite the following advantages to getting involved
- *Increase in Civic Pride through local people taking on the planning and management of their environment*
 - *Long term improvement in their local environment through planting floral displays and improved cleanliness*
 - *A boost to the local economy through increased tourism*
 - *Regeneration of disadvantaged areas*
 - *Stimulation of voluntary work and co-operation between community groups*
 - *A means to address issues such as sustainability, recycling, minimising waste and conservation.*
- 4.6 The East Midlands in Bloom highest scoring entrant in 2019 was Loughborough, which could be used as a nearby comparator for benchmarking purposes. It was a new entrant in 2010.
- 4.7 The Swad in Bloom group formed in May 2019 with strong support from Swadlincote residents. The group is not far from being fully constituted as a community group and intend eventually to register for charitable status. They have a constitution, bank account and have applied for grants etc. They have a group of committed officers and members and a strong social media presence. Their Chair is the editor of *Swad Style* magazine, and their meetings are often attended by local Councillors. They work in partnership with the Swadlincote Lions, particularly on the Princess Diana Memorial Garden
- 4.8 The group have a clear set of aims and objectives, and a fully worked-up proposed action plan for 2020 (Appendix 1).
- 4.9 They propose a number of projects including
- Keeping the town centre plantings well-maintained
 - Improving a number of town centre sites with owner permission
 - Swadlincote clean-up events
 - Marketing and Promotion
 - Fundraising
- 4.10 They wish to identify any Council-owned sites that might be available for them to "adopt" and improve.
- 4.11 They have been advised by the Council on its policies and protocols for volunteers working on its land and being given a plan indicating land ownership of potential improvement sites.

- 4.12 When they are fully constituted it is likely that they will request full support from the Council for their work, in a similar manner to many other such groups throughout the UK. They are not currently considering entering either competition categories next year, in order to allow the group to consolidate.
- 4.13 Currently the Council has provided resource through a Cultural Services officer attending monthly meetings on a “watching brief”, two site meetings with Cultural and Community Services and Property Services staff to identify suitable sites, and introductory meetings with the Cultural Services Events Team. This resource requirement is likely to grow significantly as the group become more established, experienced and successful.
- 4.14 These resource implications will need to be judged against the considerable benefits of supporting and engaging with a well-run scheme. Benchmarking with nearby local authority-led, successful schemes will identify these potential benefits and resource issues. The majority of such in Bloom schemes are led by local councils.
- 4.15 There is currently government funding available for “Pocket Parks” and an opportunity to create one in the Town Centre on High Street/West Street has been identified. A new site must be called a “pocket park” and be branded as such, it must address a specific local need, and be accessible and available for the community who wish to use it and, ideally, be openly accessible to all. This funding is only available to community groups and requires some match-funding from the Council which may be available from S106 monies.
- 4.16 The Swad in Bloom group appear to be ideal to act as applicants for this grant and the Council is supporting them through the process. An indicative design has been prepared to accompany this application.
- 4.17 The RHS In Bloom scheme has been successful throughout the UK in energising communities, businesses, organisations, partners and Council staff to improve local neighbourhoods. This success requires commitment from the local authority.
- 4.18 The In Bloom scheme requires resourcing with some officer time and finances, but the consequent outcomes and rewards can considerably outweigh the inputs made, if managed well.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There would be an entry fee to join any competitive stage. It is anticipated the fee would be met by the SIB group.
- 5.2 Match-funding of circa £10,000 would be required if the Pocket Park application is successful. This is available from S106 Capital funding.
- 5.3 There are no other immediate financial implications, but longer-term commitments may require more resources of officer time and materials.

6.0 Corporate Implications

Employment Implications

- 6.1 No direct implications, although it should be noted that there is likely to be an initial increased demand for officer time to support various projects, and demand could increase should the group’s efforts prove successful.

Legal Implications

None known

Corporate Plan Implications

Swad in Bloom is likely to contribute significantly to the following Corporate Values, Priorities and Key aims

6.2 Our Values

- a. Take pride in our place
- b. Achieve excellence in all we do
 - i. We will take pride in our district, always striving for continuous improvement

6.3 Our Environment

- a. Improve the environment of the district
 - i. Reduce fly-tipping and litter through education and engagement
 - ii. Enhance biodiversity across the District
- b. Tackle Climate Change
 - i. Strive to make South Derbyshire District Council carbon neutral by 2030
- c. Enhance the attractiveness of South Derbyshire
 - i. Enhance the appeal of Swadlincote town centre as a place to visit
 - ii. Improve public spaces to create an environment for people to enjoy

6.4 Our People

- a. Engage with communities
 - i. Support and celebrate volunteering, community groups and the voluntary sector
- b. Supporting and safeguarding the most vulnerable
 - i. Promote health and wellbeing across the district
- c. Deliver excellent services
 - i. Ensure consistency in the way the Council deals with its service users
 - ii. Have in place methods of communication that enables customers to provide and receive information

6.5 Our Future

- a. Support economic growth and infrastructure
 - i. Influence the improvement of infrastructure to meet the demands of growth
- b. Transforming the Council
 - i. Provide modern ways of working that support the Council to deliver services to meet changing needs
 - ii. Source appropriate commercial investment opportunities for the Council

6.6 Risk Impact

There is potential for significant reputational risk to the Council if the group is not supported, particularly in view of their social media presence.

There is potential for significant financial risk due to the pressure for continuous improvement, although this could be outweighed by the benefits, if managed well.

7.0 Community Impact

Consultation

- 7.1 If successful, the community impact will be considerable. Council Officers and SIBG group members have been in close consultation about the early development of the group and their action plan.

Equality and Diversity Impact

- 7.2 None known

Social Value Impact

- 7.3 There is likely to be considerable social value impact due to the involvement of local businesses, community groups, residents and organisations etc.

Environmental Sustainability

- 7.4 The scheme will enhance the Council's achievements in terms of sustainability. A third of the judging covers "Environmental Responsibility" -projects which tackle issues related to the waste hierarchy, composting and recycling; tackling litter, graffiti, vandalism and antisocial behaviour - to encourage long-term neighbourhood improvements.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 As the aspirations of the SIBG are so compatible with the Council's Corporate Plan, and the group appear to be robust, enthusiastic and well-organised, there are no immediate concerns or reasons to prevent the Council supporting them in the short term.
- 8.2 The longer-term implications of this support will be the need for the Council to join the scheme and take on a partnership role.
- 8.3 Such support would need to be driven from the highest organisational level to ensure success, perhaps with a "Bloom Champion" at Lead Member level
- 8.4 A further report to be brought back to Committee in 2021 reporting on the first year of the SiBG including how the partnership could be taken forward.

9.0 Background Papers

- 9.1. Swad in Bloom Action Plan and town centre site map