

REPORT TO:	FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 12
DATE OF MEETING:	29th AUGUST 2019	CATEGORY: RECOMMENDED
REPORT FROM:	STRATEGIC DIRECTOR (SERVICE DELIVERY)	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	ADRIAN LOWERY, 5764, adrian.lowery@southderbyshire.gov.uk	DOC:
SUBJECT:	PICTORIAL WILD FLOWER PLANTING TRIAL	
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE:

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Finance and Management Committee approves the financial implications of the Pictorial Wild Flower Planting Trial report, approved by Environment and Development Services Committee on the 15 August 2018.

2.0 Purpose of the Report

- 2.1 To seek approval for the financing of a pictorial wildflower planting trial as a pilot scheme at four locations within the district. The proposed trial was approved at Environmental and Development Services Committee on the 15 August with a recommendation that the financial implications be referred to Finance and Management Committee.

3.0 Executive Summary

- 3.1 Unlike the current grass cutting arrangements, pictorial wildflower planting requires a different management and mowing regime.
- 3.2 The proposed pilot areas for pictorial wildflower planting are as follows:
- Hartshorne Road, Repton – Right hand side of road heading towards Hartshorne just after the Knights Lane junction.
 - Ticknall Road, Ticknall – Left hand side of road heading into Ticknall
 - The Mease, Hilton - Derby Road end nearest to A50.
 - William Nadin Way, Swadlincote
- 3.3 In addition there are 'nature sites' where a meadow regime can replace current regular mowing, e.g. Sandholes, Midway.
- 3.4 A meeting is planned with the County Council's Head of Network Management in August to progress this proposal and to explore opportunities for joint working, however the pilots would need to commence this autumn for wildflowers to appear

next spring so a decision to proceed is needed prior to any agreement with the County Council.

4.0 Detail

4.1 In April 2018, Environmental and Development Services and Housing and Community Services Committee agreed a set of standards for how the Council will manage a number of its public facing services including:

- parks and open spaces
- grass cutting and street cleansing
- Housing estates and communal areas.

4.2 These standards set out the frequency and the nature of the services that would be delivered and have since been underpinned by Key Performance Indicators in the Council Plan on:

- Improving local environmental quality (measured through an annual survey supported by Keep Britain Tidy)
- Adherence to the grass cutting standards.

4.3 South Derbyshire District Council cuts grass to ensure that people can use the roads and pavements safely. The Council cuts the grass on all Council-owned land, highway verges (as an agent for Derbyshire County Council), public open spaces, parks, town centres and memorial gardens.

4.4 The County Council has indicated that whilst it would not object to the Council piloting wildflower planting on highway verges, it does not have any resources to support this. It would also not support just leaving grass to grow as this creates safety/visibility issues.

4.5 For all highway verges, the Council would need to apply for and obtain a cultivation licence from the County Council prior to any planting taking place.

4.6 As a guide, areas outside 30mph signs are cut three times a year and traffic sight lines are cut four times a year. Under the Agency Agreement with Derbyshire County Council the Council is required to cut a metre strip of the verge in two of every three years with the third year requiring a full verge cut back to the highway boundary. Areas within the 30mph zones are cut 16 times a year.

4.7 The Council uses large mowers to make cutting as efficient as possible. Sometimes, these machines cannot cut close enough to trees and bases of obstacles so trimmers are used to ensure a consistent cut across all areas on every cut. Grass cuttings are not collected.

4.8 There are a number of distinct approaches to the introduction of wildflower verges and increasing biodiversity, principally these are “re-wilding”, native wildflower plantings and ornamental wildflower planting. Re-wilding” i.e. merely allowing grass to grow and cut and clear annually, is perhaps considered the more sustainable option and is sympathetic to local biodiversity, but can take between three to five years to show any noticeable difference. Native wildflower and ornamental wildflower planting can deliver quicker results.

4.9 Unlike the current grass cutting arrangements, wildflower plantings require a different management and mowing regime which involves:

- Autumn Marking out the area to be planted
Spraying to eradicate weeds
Rotavating
Seeding
- Spring/Summer
Once the seeds have flowered and set seed the verges then need to be cut, raked, bailed and cleared.
The arisings then need to be disposed of. Currently cut grass is blown back on to the verges with no disposal costs.
- The above management process would then start again with repeat sowing necessary to maintain the full impact of the wildflower the following year.

4.10 The proposed pilot areas for pictorial meadows are as follows:

- Hartshorne Road, Repton – Right hand side of road heading towards Hartshorne just after the Knights Lane junction.
- Ticknall Road, Ticknall – Left hand side of road heading into Ticknall
- The Mease, Hilton - Derby Road end nearest to A50.
- William Nadin Way, Swadlincote

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 Costs in year one include for two cuts and clearances and two herbicide treatments plus full coverage seeding, subsequent years include for one cut and clearance and top up seeding.

	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	Total
Manpower	£3,822	£1,912	£1,950	£1,989	£2,028	£11,701
Equipment Hire Costs	£2,250	£750	£ 765	£ 780	£ 795	£ 5,340
Materials	£1,214	£447	£ 456	£ 465	£ 474	£ 3,056
Total	£7,286	£3,109	£3,162	£3,234	£3,297	£20,088

5.2 Initially, the Council would need to hire the type of equipment required to undertake the management of such sites during the pilot phase as compact tractors and bailing equipment would be required for larger sites, or ride-on flail mower/collectors for smaller sites such as verges or parks.

5.3 In the long-term; investment by the Council in such equipment would need to be considered. Wildflower management is more intensive than conventional mowing therefore consideration about the number of staff and appropriate training would need to be factored in to any longer-term undertaking.

5.4 Due to the favourable out-turn on the General Fund in 2018/19 as reported in July; the additional cost for the trial scheme can be funded through the General Fund.

5.5 Once the outcome of the trial has been considered, any additional long-term costs will need to be evaluated and reported accordingly.

6.0 Corporate Implications

Employment Implications

- 6.1 Wildflower management is more intensive than conventional mowing therefore consideration about the number of staff and appropriate training would need to be factored in to any longer-term undertaking.
- 6.2 In the short-term workforce resources would need to be deployed on overtime to enable planting to take place this year. Overtime is voluntary and the Council would therefore be reliant on securing sufficient volunteers to undertake the work in the short timescale available.

Legal Implications

- 6.3 Renegotiation of the Highways' Agency Agreement with the County Council could be required.

Corporate Plan Implications

- 6.4 If successful the potential roll-out of wildflower planting in parts of the District may require the Council to rethink the Service Standards that have previously been agreed.

Risk Impact

- 6.5 There is increased awareness from the public of the potential for public land owners to improve their impact on the built and natural environment; there is momentum throughout the Country to be seen to be doing something, particularly following the National Pollinator Strategy in 2014. Failure to implement such a scheme could have a detrimental effect on the Council's reputation.

7.0 Community Impact

Consultation

- 7.1 Prior to implementing the pilots the Council will need to develop a communications plan to inform and in some cases persuade a sometimes skeptical public about the benefits of not cutting the grass.

Equality and Diversity Impact

- 7.2 Not applicable

Social Value Impact

- 7.3 Wildflower planting increases biodiversity, pictorial planting enhances the aesthetic appearance of otherwise bland green spaces and encourages wildlife.

Environmental Sustainability

- 7.4 In August 2018 the Council established a Corporate Environmental Sustainability Group (CESG) to consider ways in which the Council could improve its environmental credentials. This was timely, given the most recent Council Motion in June 2019 for

the Council to declare a Climate Change Emergency signed up to by over 100 local authorities across the country.

- 7.5 The Group's remit is to move the Council towards becoming a beacon of environmental good practice. Its first task was to focus on retaining accreditation to the International Environmental Standard ISO14001 which was successfully achieved in October 2018 but the Group is now focusing on developing a range of other environmental projects including:
- Developing a Staff Travel Plan by encouraging staff to walk, cycle and use public transport both to work and in the course of their duties to reduce carbon emissions and improve the health and well-being of staff.
 - Considering ways that the Council can better manage its own waste, water and energy improving its procurement practices to ensure consideration is given to environmental factors during the procurement process.
 - Developing a biodiversity plan for the District which has the potential to fundamentally change the way in which the Council manages its own land, public open space and land it manages on behalf of others i.e. highway verges.
- 7.6 A separate report on the agenda for this Committee which will recommend developing a biodiversity plan for the District, or what the Group is calling "A Strategic Action Plan for Nature".
- 7.7 This Plan will be a long-term Strategy for the District and will form part of the evidence base for the next Local Plan. It will help and support the Council to provide more clarity to developers on the way in which the Council would like to see net biodiversity gain being delivered as part of any future development.
- 7.8 In the short-term, however, whilst this Plan is being prepared the Group is working on a package of biodiversity measures to pilot across the District for consideration by Members. These will be outlined in full in the Committee report.
- 7.9 The first of these measures, is to undertake pilot wildflower planting/pictorial meadows in a number of locations across the District to enable a better understanding of the resources, staff, equipment etc. required (indicative costings for the pilot verges are attached) and to also gauge the public's reaction to cutting the grass less in these places.