

MANAGING THE ENVIRONMENT POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT GROUP

BRIEFING PAPER

SUBJECT: Wild Flower trials update

Background

To update members on how the wild flower trials have progressed and to inform them how wild flowers could be used within Mid Devon in the future.

Introduction

1 The use of wild flowers to create meadows or smaller naturalised areas has become very popular with District Councils and other land owners throughout the country in recent years.

2 Wild flowers can be purchased as seeds or young plants; the seed mixtures offered are blended to suite the soil and the conditions that prevail on individual sites.

3 Wild flowers thrive best in undernourished soils and on some sites it is necessary to remove a layer of the top soil and sow the seed into the subsoil.

4 At the end of the season, when seeds have been set, the wild flowers must be cut and removed leaving the viable seed to germinate the following spring; additional seed may be required to be sown in year two to aid the good establishment of perennials.

Mid Devon's Trials

5 The initial wildflower trial in 2012 was at Tiverton Cemetery, beds were created in the new extension, three mixtures were sown and one bed was left as a control.

6 The results were encouraging with a good show of annuals on one plot; this seed mix was designed to give colour in the first year and to allow the perennials time to establish,

7 In year two a number of perennials established, whilst the annuals did not self-seed in any great numbers reducing the initial colourful impact that was seen in year one; however the oxeye daisies flourished.

8 With the encouragement of this initial trial and with the anniversary of the "Great War" in 2014, it was decided to purchase two special flower mixes, named "Old Comrades" and "Least We Forget" along with a small quantity of Flanders poppy seed.

9 The seeds were sown on three sites:
Newcombe's Meadow, Crediton
Phoenix Lane Tiverton, on a roundabout and in a bed adjacent to the Multi-storey car park.

10 The areas that performed best were at Newcombes Meadow and adjacent to the multi-storey car park, the area sown on the roundabout suffered from dry conditions; partly caused by the trees and the dry summer.

Future use of Wildflowers

11 On sites where a reduction in maintenance costs can be proven, wildflower meadows can be used to good effect and further sites should be explored. An example of this practice can be seen in Phoenix Lane where two areas that were previously planted with annual bedding have now been replaced with wildflowers.

12 In an attempt to reduce maintenance costs, it has been suggested that wildflowers could be used within the Closed Churchyards; Mid Devon are responsible for seven closed churchyards. Unfortunately due to the fertile soil found within these sites and the amount of preparation necessary it is not currently considered a viable option.

13 Sites for future consideration:
Westexe Recreation Ground, there is an area within the wooded area adjacent to Heathcoate School that could be planted with a mix suitable for heavy shade.

Peoples Park, There is a grassed bank that runs along the Park Road boundary that could be sown to create interest within the park and to reduce the amount of grass cutting.

14 Careful consideration must be given to requests to create flower meadows within estate areas which are currently mowed on a regular basis. Due to the initial preparation costs and the ongoing maintenance it is likely only to be viable with additional financial assistance and perhaps an undertaking from a local environmental group to carry out the end of season mowing.

Conclusion

Officers shall continue to evaluate the use of wild flower mixtures and shall incorporate them into the landscape on sites where conditions are suitable and it is proven to be financially viable.