

## **BRIEFING PAPER**

# **Wildflower displays, grassland meadows and slow growing grass seed mixtures**

### **Background**

To update Members on the options and proposals for wildflower displays within Mid Devon in the future.

### **Introduction**

In recent years many local authorities have examined the options to increase biodiversity within the public realm. A number of options have proved to be popular and now form the basis of the routine program of work in areas that can lend themselves to the new methods.

The options available include

- Wild flower meadow displays
- Natural grassland meadows
- Slow growing or sustainable planting

### **Wild Flower Displays**

Mid Devon District Council has undertaken a number of trials of wild flower displays in recent years and, as such, it has learned that in order to maintain the vibrant displays it is essential that re-sowing of displays is required year-on-year in order to produce the consistent displays.

The term 'wild flowers' is somewhat misleading in that annual programmes for preparation and harvesting are required. However, the benefits from selective use of high pollinator mixes adds enormous value to the wildlife of the area.

### **Natural Grassland Meadows**

In certain areas of the country certain habitats such as natural acid grassland is becoming increasingly endangered due to the over-use of certain pesticides, fertilizers and over cultivation.

Many locations within the District's parks and open spaces have, for decades, been maintained on a routine mowing schedule that ensures the areas are controlled within an intensive schedule of work. This regime of maintenance is successful in complying with the tradition of highly manicured open spaces and in many cases this practice will continue to prove to be the most suitable and economically viable method of maintaining open spaces.

However, in a large number of locations, a semi-natural environment of grassland meadows can prove to be beneficial.

Large areas of grassland meadow that have carefully maintained mown footpaths throughout them do provide an extremely attractive environment to both people and wildlife. A balance of grasslands within large open spaces will allow natural corridors for urban wildlife, create a better blend of urban and rural landscapes and encourage natural habitats for local flora and fauna to return to the urban areas.

Additionally, whilst frequency of mowing will be reduced in these locations, resources will be released to focus on the more civic priorities such as town parks and major trunk road vistas.

### **Slow growing grasses or sustainable planting**

Sustainable planting designs can be an excellent way to improve the landscape of the town. These forms of planting are a step away from 'traditional park plants' and locations.

The use of herbaceous plants rather than wooded shrubs avoids the need for intensive pruning and watering and provides alternative seasonal displays to the tried and tested designs.

Alternative grass seed mixes have been used in place of the commonly used mixes within our parks and open spaces. This alternative can be successful in smaller locations. However the cost implications of using mixes that would be traditionally used on fine turf sports pitches such as golf courses or bowling greens can prove to be prohibitively expensive. Additionally, as with the use of wild flower displays, there is a need to provide ongoing maintenance to these grass swards. This would include weed killing and fertilizer to ensure that a particular sward be maintained.

### **Proposals for future use of wild flowers, environmental areas and sustainable planting schemes**

It is possible to develop a gradual introduction of new displays that will create an attractive and beneficial environmental display throughout the District.

A number of locations have been identified for new wildflower displays in grass verges throughout Tiverton and a number of locations including Crediton and Tiverton Cemeteries, Newcombes Meadow and Cullompton services roundabout (not yet confirmed).

New grassland meadows will be introduced in certain locations such as Peoples Park and Westexe Park that will maintain full access to the parks whilst improving the biodiversity of the localities.

Certain shrub beds will be removed where anti-social behaviour can occur and replaced with sustainable planting displays of low growing herbaceous plants.

### **Financial implications**

There will be an initial increased cost for new wildflower displays. Dependant on the success of displays, this could incrementally grow given the future popularity of the

displays. However, this cost could be offset by potential sponsorship of the displays and could be financially neutral with successful sponsorship.

The removal of overgrown shrub beds and replacement with sustainable planting can design out anti-social behaviour and potentially reduce vandalism within open spaces. However, year on year there will be a requirement to purchase new plants as the programme develops.

The overall cost of providing slow growing grass seed mixes within new developments is offset by the developers within the final cost of new homes. However, in order to maintain the sward within these schemes, a significant maintenance regime would be required. This maintenance cost would be prohibitively expensive and it is suggested that this level of maintenance would not be feasible within the broader open space provision. However, in terms of recommendations for sustainable gardens this could be considered as an option.

### **Conclusion**

Officers shall adopt a phased programme of introducing a combination of wildflower displays and sustainable planting throughout the districts parks and open spaces within a 10 year programme of improvements.

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