

Pollinators Project – A Pilot Meadow Creation Scheme

Final Decision-Maker	Heritage, Leisure and Culture Committee
Lead Head of Service	Jennifer Shepherd, Head of Environment & Public Realm
Lead Officer and Report Author	Andrew Williams, Parks and Open Spaces Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	Boxley, East, Fant, High Street, North, Park Wood, Shepway North.

Executive Summary

Members are asked to consider the merits of creating a more bio-diverse borough through planting a number of pollinator friendly wildflower grasslands as a pilot project. The lessons learnt from this project will inform future plans to make our parks and open spaces more attractive for residents to enjoy and better for wildlife.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. To authorise the creation of eight pollinator friendly wildflower & grassland areas to benefit bio-diversity, increase access to nature and make the borough a more attractive place.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Heritage , Leisure & Culture Committee	17 th December 2018

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 There is increasing awareness of the importance of pollinators and the threats affecting their ability to thrive and function to support our market garden and agricultural economy. Additionally there is an often reported sadness that each generation experiences a dwindling number of butterflies, bees and birds compare to those who have gone before. Wildflower meadows provide a source of nectar and cover for a wide variety of insects, which in turn, create conditions favourable to birds, bats and the grasslands homes for reptiles and small mammals. This proposal will create up to eight pollinator friendly wildflower areas totalling almost 10000m² across the borough.(1ha or 2¹/₂ acres).
- 1.2 This project has four outcomes:
- Create species rich meadows with native perennial & annual wildflowers and grasses that specifically support pollinator species which we hope will improve outcomes for butterflies and bees.
 - Provide opportunities for residents & children to get involved in sowing areas and in time learn more about the benefits of looking after the environment with increased understanding and appreciation of wildlife and wildflowers.
 - Create attractive flower rich meadows in publicly accessible places, highly visible to residents and visitors. Making a clear and positive statement of Maidstone Borough Council's intent for biodiversity goes hand in hand with pride in our borough and the social and economic benefits that our parks and open spaces offer our residents.
 - Act as a test bed to establish viability – learn and develop ideas and establish if it can be replicated and extended.
- 1.3 Additionally this project will form one of many that will help drive the Go Green Go Wild initiative to promote residents positive action to increase, protect and learn about nature in the borough.
- 1.4 Pilot sites will require ground preparation in early spring with sowing of meadow mixes of grasses, perennials and annual wildflowers. Flowering period in 2019 will be at its peak through June, July and August dominated by annuals. During 2020 the flowering period will extend into September as the perennials establish. Seed will be sourced from UK providers who grow in the UK and adhere to the 'Flora Locale' principals of integrity of UK native seed supply. This ensure there is a more appropriate genetic mix for UK conditions that is truer to that found in the wild.

- 1.5 A proposed seed mix is shown in Appendix 1 – comprising 30% flowers and 70% grass. This mix has been carefully considered to provide a high proportion of flowers to ensure it is aesthetically pleasing and provides good value. It supports bees, butterflies and other pollinators. The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) state 81% of the wildflowers included in this mixture as 'Perfect for Pollinators' . The grass component is made up of six interesting species that are of low vigour so as not to dominate the wildflowers.

The pilot sites are presented in Table 1 below.

Site location	Size (m2)	Ward
Groveswood Drive North	600	Boxley
Shepway Green*	3500	Shepway North
Parkwood Recreation Ground	1200	Park Wood
South Park (Postley Road)	600	High Street
Nr Thai Orchid **	100	Fant
Dickens Road	1200	North Ward
Bearsted Road (opposite Hilton Hotel)	2000	East
Gatland Recreation Ground	500	Fant
Total	9700	-

*Shepway Green – creation of earth banks to prevent vehicle access will help prepare ground for sowing

**subject to negotiation with Kent County Council.

- 1.6 Important considerations for identifying sites has been public access/visibility and ease of implementation including access for rotavators and choosing a variety of sizes and locations on MBC land that allows for monitoring and maintenance. The pilot sites are not already known as high value wildlife grassland so we are not interfering with known biodiverse habitats. All sites are currently a mix of short and long amenity turf or planted ornamental grass.
- 1.7 If the pilot project is given approval by HCL committee then Ward Members of each proposed site will be advised and asked to comment on any local issues that may have a direct impact on the likely success or failure of the wildflower areas and any opportunities for community involvement.

Financial Considerations:

Ground Preparation costs @ 70p m ²	£7000
Seed sowing – labour/ transport/sharp sand	£1050
Supply of seed	£1400
Total	£9450

- 1.8 Parks and Open Spaces will be able to implement this pilot scheme utilising existing available budgets. Recent additions to the plant and equipment utilised by our Grounds Maintenance team will enable us to carry out this work efficiently. An additional benefit will be the training of horticultural staff in meadow creation and maintenance.

2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 2.1 Implement scheme in-house as defined almost 10000m² at eight sites as a pilot project – sites chosen to be highly visible.
- 2.2 Implement a smaller scale scheme at fewer sites in more discrete locations to reduce expenditure and limit the pilot/test areas to enclosed parks rather than highly visible areas near highways.
- 2.3 Implement a larger borough-wide project without a pilot project. This would need additional funding and staff resource to organise and manage.
- 2.4 Alternatively it could be decided that this pilot project should not be pursued and the existing planting and maintenance regimes for the highlighted areas should be retained.

3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Members are recommended to endorse Option 2.1 above to provide a pilot project with a range of site sizes and locations that is affordable and achievable. A smaller project would not provide an opportunity to learn enough regarding the pros and cons of site types, community engagement and reactions, either positive or negative.
- 3.2 It is also not recommended that a larger borough-wide project is implemented as there is insufficient budget and it will not provide the opportunity to review and develop the project for other locations and consider any implications or public opinion.
- 3.3 Equally it is not recommended that the proposal is not taken forward as this will go against the Council's commitment to increasing biodiversity

and the objectives set out in the 10 Year Parks and Open Spaces Plan and Green and Blue Infrastructure Action Plan.

4. RISK

- 4.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework.. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.
- 4.2 The key risk associated with the recommendation relates to public perception of the project as the cutting regime will be reduced. However this risk will be mitigated through resident engagement regarding the benefits to biodiversity and pollinators and publicity around the project.
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5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 No formal consultation has been carried out, however the committee has previously raised its support for increasing biodiversity within the Borough.
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6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 If members are minded to agree the implementation of the Pollinator Project then Parks and Open Spaces will liaise with ward councillors where the pilot areas are located and provide an information pack with the site mapped, timelines for implementation, species and likely flowering times.
- 6.2 Temporary signs will be erected at each site advising people of the scheme, benefits and species they will see.

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	We do not expect the recommendation will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities. However, they will support the Council's overall achievement of its aims as set out in the 10 Year Parks and Open Spaces Strategy	Jennifer Shepherd Head of Environment & Public Realm

Risk Management	Already covered in the risk section –	Jennifer Shepherd Head of Environment & Public Realm
Financial	The proposals set out in the recommendation can be delivered within existing budgets and so need no new funding for implementation.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Jennifer Shepherd Head of Environment & Public Realm
Legal	<p>Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 gives local authorities in England a general power of competence to do anything that individuals may do. The general power applies to things that an individual may do even though they are in nature, extent or otherwise unlike anything the Council may do apart from Section The proposed Pollinators Project in exercise of the general power. Although Section 2 of the Act sets boundaries to the general power, the proposed project falls within those boundaries.</p> <p>The Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee considers matters regarding the Council's parks and open spaces and is the appropriate decision maker as regards the recommendations.</p>	Keith Trowell, Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS
Privacy and Data Protection	There are no specific privacy or data protection issues to	Keith Trowell, Team Leader

	address.	(Corporate Governance), MKLS
Equalities	When looking to– involve residents (and children) in sowing areas it is important that we engage widely with the community to ensure inclusivity.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer.
Crime and Disorder	Not applicable	Head of Service or Manager
Procurement	On accepting the recommendations, the Council will then follow procurement exercises for purchase of seed as appropriate. We will complete those exercises in line with financial procedure rules.	Head of Service & Section 151 Officer

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix 1: Proposed seed mix
- Appendix 2: Proposed site locations

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None